

CHARLES FREEMAN

EGYPT, GREECE, & ROME

Civilizations of the Ancient Mediterranean

THIRD EDITION



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CHARLES FREEMAN

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In memory of my mother Winefride (1914–2006) who scrambled up with me to the Iron Age fort on Wardlaw Hill, Dumfries, in August 1957 and so set off my fascination with the ancient world, and my father John Freeman (1913–86) who loved the Mediterranean and its peoples.

FOREWORD TO THE THIRD EDITION

By Oswyn Murray

The first edition of this work came out in 1996, the second in 2004; it is a great pleasure to welcome its appearance in a third edition. Each time Charles Freeman has revised large sections of the work to take account of recent discoveries and new ideas, so that his book remains the best and most up-to-date survey of the history of the entire ancient Mediterranean and Middle Eastern world.

As I said in the prefaces to previous editions, Charles Freeman has tried to give a narrative account of the main events within each period, but also to highlight the developments in cultural and social history, and to show something of the evidence on which his judgements are based. He has indicated where the evidence is uncertain, or where his interpretation may be controversial; but he has not avoided the responsibility of making decisions about the evidence in order to present a clear account. The aim of all of us who struggle to write in that most difficult of historical genres, the introduction to the study of a period, must always be to combine the current state of information with the excitement of new discoveries and encouragement to study the subject further. History aims at producing narratives and explanations, but it is the methods by which these aims are achieved that constitute the most interesting aspect of being a historian; and making historians is at least as important as writing history. For history is a creative activity that must be renewed in each generation: there will never be a fixed and final narrative, partly because our evidence is incomplete and growing all the time, and partly because our explanations of events and the ways they interconnect reflect our own interpretation of our present world, and so are always changing. As the philosopher and ancient historian R.G. Collingwood insisted, it is not the facts that are interesting in history, but the questions and their answers—and these can never be fixed.

There is an intrinsic merit in the wide sweep of Freeman's book that makes it stand out among its competitors. He has consulted the experts in each area of the ancient world: although he makes up his own mind and judiciously steers between the various hypotheses with which experts tend to play for the sake of argument, he is always in touch with the latest thinking in each area. And therefore, just as Fernand Braudel did a generation ago with his work on the Mediterranean and on world history, he reminds us all, professionals and amateurs, of the importance of the wider perspective. The largest school for the study of ancient western history is no longer situated in Europe or North America, but at Nankai University, Tianjin in the People's Republic of China. As Mediterranean and Near Eastern history find their place in world history, and as the Far East begins to confront the history of the West, more than ever before Charles Freeman's synthesis of specialist researches is needed to point the way forward for the next generation.

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

The writer Callimachus, who flourished in Alexandria in the third century BC, was famed for his aphorisms of which one, *mega biblion, mega kakon*, ‘big book, big mistake’, haunts me as I begin this preface. It may have been a dig at his literary rival Apollonius Rhodius for his large epic on Jason and the Argonauts but Callimachus, an elitist and refined writer in the later tradition of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, is right in suggesting that things can get out of hand. My defence is that the history of the ancient Mediterranean is a large subject and I feel that it needs to be taken gently if its values are to be appreciated.

Luckily, I have got away with it so far and I am delighted that Oxford University Press has commissioned a third edition of *Egypt, Greece and Rome*. I have even been allowed an extra fifty pages which means that I have been able to restore the ‘legacy’ chapter at the end that was squeezed out in the second edition as well as add in other important developments in scholarship and archaeology since the last edition.

The ten years since the appearance of the last edition have been ones in which I have been able to travel more widely in the Mediterranean (children leave home eventually!) and run study tours to Italy and classical Greece and Turkey. I was also delighted to be asked in 2005 to be Historical Consultant to the revived Blue Guides, thirty-five years after I had written a letter to my parents from Delphi saying that it was taking me a long time to get round the site because I had been lent a Blue Guide that seemed to have something to say about every stone! This was the celebrated Stuart Rossiter edition and I was moved to be asked to contribute to the seventh edition (2008). My experiences with the Blue Guides have made me think more deeply as to how to present the ancient world to travellers and resulted in my *Sites of Antiquity: Fifty Sites that Explain the Classical World* (Taunton, UK, 2009), which might be seen as a companion to this book.

Egypt, Greece, and Rome remains what it has always been, an introductory but comprehensive text for the general reader and those students who need a foundation before going further. No one can be unaware of the enormous interest in ancient history at a popular level but increasing specialization and the rise of ‘companion’ volumes of essays means that it is increasingly difficult to find a full overview in one place. I hope that by keeping these three major civilizations together in one volume, together with other important but lesser-known ones, I have created a book that can not only be read as a whole but used to fill in gaps and relate events and periods to each other. I have put in new material, rewritten several chapters completely, broken up one or two chapters, and added one or two extra ‘interludes’. General further reading recommendations are now grouped at the back with more specific recommendations linked in to the text. I have also taken the opportunity to completely revise the illustrations. I hope that this will sustain the work for a further ten years.

Charles Freeman

December 2013

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Egypt, Greece and Rome was conceived in 1994 as a result of a recommendation by Oswyn Murray, with whom I had been working on another classics project, to Hilary O'Shea, head of the Classics Department of Oxford University Press. Now, twenty years on, Oswyn Murray is still at hand to provide another Foreword and Hilary is still, if only just, before retirement, in her same role at OUP. I thank them both for their continued support. I am sure that the high reputation that the OUP Classics Department enjoys in the international academic community had done much to sustain the survival of this book into yet another edition. Hilary allowed me 'not more than fifty extra pages' for this edition but her staff generously failed to measure the text I sent in and I have to admit to having gone rather further than this—the word checker announced a final total of 345,000 words! Oswyn has also provided me with news of exciting new developments, both archaeological and textual, that I have also been able to squeeze into the text.

The first edition of this book owed much to a team of advisers and I would like to repeat, yet again, my thanks to these: Averil Cameron, John Drinkwater, Amélie Kuhrt, John Ray, John Rich, Nigel Spivey, and Ruth Whitehouse. Paul Cartledge, John Ray, and Michael Scott have provided ideas and information for the new edition and Paul Cartledge and Alan Lloyd have read large parts of the text and contributed many helpful comments. Both felt able to provide endorsements and I must thank Paul in particular for his consistent support not only of myself but others who work on the ancient world outside the walls of academia. Michael Scott and Richard Miles, both of whose work in presenting documentaries on the ancient world I much admire, were also kind enough to provide endorsements.

Those who entrust themselves to my Mediterranean tours allow me to travel much more widely and often around the sites. Long may they continue to sign up and provide their own insights into the civilizations we explore. Annabel Barber and Tom Howells at the Blue Guides have forced me to think how to describe the historical background of important sites to an educated audience and, as I have said in my Preface, it is moving to be involved so closely, as Historical Consultant, with a series I first encountered 'in the field' forty-five years ago.

This new edition was taken in hand at OUP by Taryn Das Neves and, when she left to return to South Africa, by Annie Rose and Kizzy Taylor-Richelieu. They have done an extraordinary job in keeping a very complex project in good order and it has been a pleasure to see it evolve into book form. Edwin (again!) and Jackie Pritchard provided firm but judicious copy-editing and the final proofreading was done by Carolyn McAndrew. Tracking down and assembling pictures was a major project in itself as I wanted to rethink many of the illustrations. Fo Orbell succeeded in tracking down almost everything with impressive competence, Annie Rose kept it all together in

beautifully organized folders, and Jonathan Bargus completed the final page design. Many thanks to all.

In the last edition I reported that my mother was still able in her eighty-ninth year to visit the Anglo-Saxon site of Sutton Hoo with me. Alas, time finally caught up with her and she will not see this new edition but it remains dedicated to my parents who, from their own very different approaches to the romance of the past, first got me reading and exploring these fascinating civilizations.

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The Acts of the Apostles contains one of the most vivid accounts of travel from the ancient world (Chapters 27–8). The apostle Paul had exercised his right as a Roman citizen to appeal directly to the emperor and so needed to travel by sea from Caesarea, on the coast of Palestine, to Rome. Paul, accompanied by a centurion, as he was officially in custody, set out in the autumn, probably of AD 60. The two first made their way north up the coast to the ancient Phoenician port of Sidon. Next, to avoid unfavourable winds, the ship worked its way around the northern coast of Cyprus and then westwards across the open sea, past Cilicia and Pamphylia, now south-eastern Turkey, to reach the thriving port of Myra. Here Paul and the centurion transferred to a ship that had made its way north from Alexandria. This battled its way along the coast to Cnidus, on the south-western tip of Asia Minor, before giving up in the face of contrary winds and heading south to pass along the southern coast of Crete. It was now well into autumn and Paul hoped they would winter there. However, his guard and captain thought otherwise and the ship continued across the open sea towards Sicily. Paul's fears were justified. A gale blew up and it was only after a terrifying fourteen days of storms that they managed to beach the ship on the coast of Malta where its stern broke up. They had to wait until the spring when another ship from Alexandria, which had been wintering on the island, set off to take them to Syracuse on the east coast of Sicily and then round the southern heel of Italy and so up the coast to Puteoli (the modern Pozzuoli) where the grain ships from Alexandria docked. Paul continued on to Rome.

So much has changed in the Mediterranean since two thousand years ago but it is still possible to follow the route of Paul's journey by sail, pass the same landscapes and contours of the shore, and encounter the same frustrations with contrary winds. In 2007 four of us followed part of the same journey in a 38-foot sailing cruiser we had chartered. Our projected passage was from Göcek in the Gulf of Fethiye in southern Turkey, westwards, to Cnidus. It was early spring, the shores had hardly begun to awake to a new season, and the bays where we anchored were still empty of other craft. The winds were fickle, usually light or non-existent, and we had to abandon our hope of not using our motor in order to make progress. The frustration was as great as it would have been two thousand years ago unless one was a grandee with a hundred oarsmen at hand.

As we made our way westwards, it was easy to see the remains of the civilizations of the past. We were not far from Göcek when we anchored in the so-called Tomb

Bay from where we were able to clamber up the hillside to find deserted tombs carved into the face of the rock. This was the wild and mountainous coastline of ancient Lycia. The Lycians were cut off from their neighbours inland by mountain ranges and had their own language and history. They fought ferociously to defend their autonomy within, successively, the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman empires. The Romans were shrewd enough to give Lycia the status of a province of the empire. Ancient ruins were scattered all along the coastline and it was common to come across isolated sarcophagi with the distinctive Lycian pointed lids. The hillside tombs of Tomb Bay were probably from the Lycian city of Cyra that flourished in the fifth and sixth century BC.

At the western entrance of the Gulf the secure and deep anchorage of Kizilkuyruk sheltered us as it had done shipping for thousands of years. A path led up from the bay and eventually came out on to a small plain where the ruins of the city of Lydae were spread out. Two mausoleums, perhaps from the Hellenistic period (see Chapter 20), survived and the site as a whole was marvellously evocative in its isolation, typical of the vast numbers of classical cities in Turkey that are today virtually inaccessible except on foot and hardly excavated. It was easy to scrape away on the surface and reach an original pavement, possibly of the *agora*, the market-place. This was probably one of those Greek-speaking cities that flourished under Roman rule (see Chapter 29) and survived into Byzantine times. Yet apart from a mention in the *Geography* by the second century Ptolemy of Alexandria, it has vanished from the literary sources.

Beyond the modern port of Marmaris, there were reminders of the difficulties of sailing in the ancient world. At Serce Limani, there is what appears to be a perfect enclosed harbour ('limani' is Turkish for harbour) but within it there are no ruins. Why had it never been settled? The answer was provided by a shipwreck discovered by George Bass, the doyen of underwater archaeology and excavator of the famous Uluburun shipwreck of 1300 BC (see p. 36). It was of a Byzantine ship loaded with Islamic glass and Byzantine metals that had sunk at the entrance to the harbour in the eleventh century AD. Its position suggested that it had tried to seek refuge in the harbour but had been caught by the shifting winds that are still prevalent at the entrance there today and had been driven on shore. Experienced sailors, especially those manning the more cumbersome merchant ships of earlier times, had learned not to risk it.

A far better entrance was to be found in the next bay to the west, now called Bozuk Buju, and this is where larger Greek and Roman fleets had assembled over the centuries. Perhaps the most famous was that of Demetrius Poliorcetes, 'the taker of cities', who had gathered forces and siege engines here in 305 BC before, in the struggle for dominance in the east following the death of Alexander the Great, he had attempted to take the island of Rhodes. Despite a siege lasting a year, the Rhodians held out and celebrated their victory by building the Colossus, a statue of the city's patron god, Helios, which stood alongside the harbour as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The finest survival in this bay is the fort on the headland. Its carefully fitted stone walls had been assembled without

mortar and still stand well above ground. Again it is probably a construction from the Hellenistic period. There were breathtaking views from the summit along the coast and across to Rhodes so that any raiders would have been spotted long before they arrived.

Eventually we arrived at the site of Cnidus on the end of a peninsula. We had passed the cliff top base of a monument possibly built to commemorate the victory of the Athenian mercenary admiral Conon over the Spartans in 394 BC. The massive lion that had topped it had been taken off along with many other statues from Cnidus in 1859 by the archaeologist Charles Newton and is now in the British Museum. Cnidus is an especially nostalgic place for me as I worked on the excavations there in 1968 (when I was 20). The Cnidians had created a double harbour by building a causeway between the mainland and an island in the fourth century BC when the site was first occupied. The smaller of the two, 'the trireme harbour', as the first century AD geographer Strabo called it, was big enough to take twenty warships (in 1968 we used to sit on the beach there watching the sun set each evening). The larger harbour still had its original breakwaters and it is a magnificent experience to sail into it, passing the original theatre on the shoreline with the deserted terraces sloping up towards the city's acropolis.

Creating the new harbours was a shrewd decision by the Cnidians. They provided ample space for ships to anchor while they were waiting for the prevailing winds from the north, the *meltemi* of the summer months, to change and so there would be good business to have from the visitors. The most famous, or, to some, notorious, treasure of the city was the life-size nude Aphrodite created by the fourth-century BC sculptor Praxiteles. It shocked the Greek world for its impudence in showing the goddess naked but the Cnidians exulted in the scandal. It soon became a tourist attraction. Its fame soared when an admirer assaulted the goddess leaving his semen on its thigh to be shown off to inquisitive onlookers. The statue has long since vanished. It was probably taken north to Constantinople in the fourth or fifth century AD where it is believed to have been destroyed in a fire. The excavations on the site have, however, revealed a circular pavement on a northern terrace of the city that answers to the ancient descriptions of the shrine.

So Cnidus became wealthy. It is an important site for archaeologists because it was never built on and simply decayed, perhaps as a result of the drying up of its water supply but more likely as the result of the disappearance of trade in the seventh and eighth centuries AD. Its remains are still laid out on its terraces. There was a residential area on the former island and theatres and temples among the houses on the mainland. Much of its original walls survive. Cnidus had famous citizens as well. The fifth-century BC Ctesias, who probably came from an older settlement of the Cnidians along the coast, was a historian of Persia and of India. He provided the earliest account of India known in the west. Eudoxus (c.410–c.350 BC) was one of the great mathematical astronomers of the Greek world and after a distinguished career across the Mediterranean world was said to have built his own observatory in the city. He was the first astronomer to attempt a mathematical model of the planets. Sostratus, claimed by some as the architect of the famous lighthouse of

Alexandria, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, also called Cnidus his native city.

Soaking up the fragmentary remains of the ancient Mediterranean is a fundamental experience for those studying classical civilizations. Anyone travelling to Athens or Rome or any number of other classical sites (see my *Sites of Antiquity*, Taunton, 2009, for examples) will be following in the footsteps of those pioneers who rediscovered this world from the fifteenth century onwards (see further Chapter 36). However, traditionally, the academic study of the ancient world has been not of its ruins but of its literature. Latin had always survived as the language of the western church but from the fourteenth century the classical style of Cicero was championed, his texts rediscovered, and Ciceronian Latin became the medium of scholarship. The study of Latin, and from the sixteenth century Greek, texts became a symbol of intellectual elitism and at the core of any traditional education. These were ‘the classics’.

The word ‘classic’ itself is derived from the Latin *classicus*, ‘of the highest class’ of the five into which the Roman citizenry were divided when meeting in the assembly known as the *comitia centuriata*, and the term refers not only to a work picked out for its enduring excellence (as often in ‘classical music’) but for Greek and Roman civilization as a whole, as if it represented a peak of human achievement. (The first recorded use in this sense is, in fact, in the second century AD.) However, linking the mastery of surviving classical texts to social status led to a formalized rite of passage. Homer and Virgil, Demosthenes and Cicero made up the initiation, with young scholars then progressing to the famous Greek tragedians, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, and, next, to Aristophanes and, in Latin literature, Terence, Lucretius, Horace, and Juvenal. Plato and Aristotle followed. The historians Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Caesar, Livy, and Sallust were also part of the canon of texts. (See Françoise Waquet, *Latin, or the Empire of a Sign*, London, 2001, for this curriculum. All these authors are described in the following chapters—see their Index entries.)

By 1900 the examination system in the public (i.e. private) schools of England had become ossified. I still have the papers sat at Winchester College by my great-uncle Kenneth Freeman in 1901 when he was 18. There were twelve papers dealing with classical subjects and they were mostly concerned with translations to and from texts. So, in the Divinity paper, Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians had to be translated from the Greek. English texts, including one from Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, had to be translated into Greek verse or Latin elegiacs. It was possible to achieve a 100 per cent as young Freeman managed for his translation of a passage from Thucydides. (Quite how this was marked is unclear but Kenneth was a top scholar going on to win the Senior Chancellor’s Medal in Classics at Cambridge before dying, tragically, at only 24.) Most of the other questions concentrated on the specific use of language and grammar (and even in the 1960s when I was ‘construing’ texts this remained the case). There was virtually nothing on history or the broader understanding of classical civilizations. Nor was there, at this pre-university level, anything from the works of Plato or Aristotle. One had to wait until

Oxford or Cambridge to read Plato's *Republic* or Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, staples of the curriculum.

The core texts known since 1500 (including the authors noted above) have hardly been added to and so have been subject to ever more meticulous study among those classicists seeking to reach the top of their profession. The scrutiny to which they were subjected is astonishing. Sir Kenneth Dover (1920–2010), widely regarded as the finest Greek scholar of his generation (not least for the way he opened up the serious study of Greek homosexuality), describes a commentary he made of Books VI and VII of Thucydides' *The Peloponnesian War*. It involved him 'in some six thousand hours of work altogether, much of it in the minutiae of chronology, grammar and textual criticism'. On one occasion he looked up 'all six hundred examples of a certain common preposition of Thucydides in order to elucidate the precise sense of one passage'. Another fine Oxford classicist, Jasper Griffin, remembers, in the 1950s, a course of three lectures a week covering three terms on the text of a single play by Euripides which did not even reach the end of the text. One might ask how such a painstaking approach to ancient texts achieved anything of significance. Could one imagine an English scholar applying the same dedication to a Russian or French work of history? Yet as recent work on *The Histories* of Herodotus shows (in a number of scholarly commentaries published by Cambridge and Oxford University Presses in recent years), there is still much fascination in decoding that great historian's sophisticated use of language.

As Dover's work suggests, one result of there being so few surviving texts was to give them a sacred quality. The pioneering Moses Finley, who brought the fresh air of anthropology into classical scholarship in Cambridge in the 1950s and 1960s, complained that 'sources written in Latin and Greek occupy a privileged status and are immune from the canons of judgement and criticism that are applied to all other documentation'. Another bias was towards believing that the Greeks and Romans themselves privileged the written word. Yet this was primarily an oral culture where rhetoric was considered one of the supreme arts (see Interlude 4). The philosopher Plato noted that one cannot engage in debate with the written word: 'If you ask them [words] anything about what they say... they go on telling you the same thing over and over again forever.' Plato emphasized his point by presenting his arguments as dialogues in which his participants argue down an issue until they reach philosophical bedrock.

Yet the studied texts are among a tiny coterie of survivors. The amount of ancient writing which has been lost is staggering, and it may be the best of what was written. Geoffrey Lloyd, the leading expert on the history of Greek science, suspects that much of the finest work in Greek science and mathematics was discarded because it was simply too difficult for later generations to grasp. The logician and physician Galen and the astronomer Ptolemy, both working in the second century AD, gained such authority that much work from before their day was considered inferior and not preserved. There are hundreds of recorded commentaries from Late Antiquity on earlier Latin authors but none survives (unlike many Christian commentaries that we still have). Sophocles is considered one of the finest

playwrights of western literature and wrote some 130 plays, but only seven, some 5 per cent of the total, survive. How would we assess Shakespeare if we had only *Twelfth Night*, *Hamlet*, or any one other of his plays to know him by? The picture we have of the achievements of the ancient world is therefore distorted, and it is tempting to think how it might have been affected if a different pattern of texts had survived—the later books of Tacitus' *Annals* instead of the earlier ones, or the earlier books of the fourth century AD historian Ammianus Marcellinus instead of the later ones.

So the voices of the vast majority of the Greek and Roman populations and their subjects have vanished unheard. In his study of Roman slavery, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Cambridge, 1994), Keith Bradley records only one freed slave, the philosopher Epictetus, who actually describes the indignities of slavery from the point of view of one who had endured them. Women's voices have also been lost. There are the few surviving poems of Sappho but then virtually nothing until the Christian era and the diary of the martyred Perpetua (see p. 596). Any assessment of the position of these disenfranchised groups has to be decoded from the texts that survive.

There is now much greater sensitivity towards the wider contexts within which texts are created. This is partly because more are being discovered in settings outside the monasteries where most of the originals were preserved. One can now cite the gradual publication of the vast papyri cache (100,000 fragments) from Oxyrhynchus in Egypt that dates from the Hellenistic and Roman periods. (Well covered in Peter Parsons, *City of the Sharp-Nosed Fish: Greek Papyri beneath the Egyptian Sand Reveal a Long-Lost World*, London, 2007.) Its discovery has helped revise the rigid picture of ancient literature that had prevailed since the Renaissance. There are over a thousand fragments from Homer, an indication of his immense popularity as a 'classic' throughout the Greek and Roman era. These show how variant readings were gradually reduced in favour of a finalized text by the end of the second century BC. Homer is not the only author who had achieved such a high status; the tragedian Euripides was second to him and, interestingly, the twenty most popular authors in the cache were all writing before 200 BC. In other words we are dealing with a literate culture at home with a favourite set of earlier 'classic' texts. The second-century AD Plutarch may have derided the people of Oxyrhynchus as 'barbarians', but they were reading his sophisticated works within a generation.

Books provided solace for many living in remote Egyptian villages. 'If you have already copied the books, send them, so that we have something to pass the time, because we have no one to talk to', reads one letter. Quite apart from what the Oxyrhynchus cache tells us of 'colonial' culture, an immense amount of background knowledge has been added. A tragedy by Aeschylus, *The Suppliants*, had long been considered one of his first and used to make statements about the early nature of tragedy until a text from Oxyrhynchus showed that it was actually relatively late! The finds from Egypt also show the slow adoption of the *codex*, sheets of papyrus bound in book form, at the expense of the papyrus roll. The *codex* appears in the first century AD but only 1.5 per cent of texts are presented in this form. By AD 300 the percentage is 50 and by AD 500, 90. The roll gradually becomes obsolete as the

book takes its place. (Recent work shows that the *codex* first developed in Rome but was then adopted by Christian communities in Egypt. See Roger Bagnall, *Early Christian Books in Egypt*, Princeton and Oxford, 2009.)

As will be seen, the climate of Egypt is ideal for the preservation of papyrus and much else besides but it is not the only source of new texts. A whole library of philosophy found in charred and brittle form in the opulent Villa dei Papyri in Herculaneum, a casualty of the volcanic eruption of AD 79 that also buried nearby Pompeii, may eventually be deciphered. Then there is the remarkable selection of human voices surviving from wooden writing tablets found preserved in waterlogged pits at the Roman fort of Vindolanda, near what was to become Hadrian's Wall in northern Britain. These letters not only bring the reader face to face with life as it was lived in a frontier garrison at the end of the first century AD but provide details of economic life, the organization of the army, the Latin language at its most vernacular, and the extent of literacy.

The most abundant source of new texts comes from inscriptions on stone, pottery, metal, or, in rare cases such as Vindolanda, wood. Possibly half a million inscriptions from the Greek and Roman world have now been published. Epigraphy, which is concerned not only with the recovery, translation, and editing of ancient inscriptions but with the placing of them, like other texts, in the political and social context in which they were written, is now a major specialism in its own right. Not only is the range of epigraphic texts much wider than those of the traditional canon of literature, but inscriptions are often discovered in their original settings, on the walls of public buildings, for instance. Some have provided a key to a whole civilization. The decree inscribed in three scripts and two languages on the Rosetta Stone, now in the British Museum, led to the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphics. Many have a direct historical value (the 'Decree of Themistocles' discovered in 1959 at Troezen or the Athenian Tribute Lists, for example, discussed in Chapters 13 and 16 respectively). Others give a flavour of city life, the dates of buildings, and the names and status of those who built them. (The city of Aphrodisias in south-western Turkey has been especially abundant in public inscriptions.) Some of the more personal (although the 'personal' nature of any 'public' inscription needs to be judged with care) reflect marital harmony and commitment as in the famous *Laudatio Turiae*, a Roman funeral eulogy from the first century BC for one Turia by her husband who praises her constancy during the upheavals of the civil wars. (Childless, she even offers to divorce him so that he can beget heirs, a proposal he angrily rejects.) (See further John Bodel (ed.), *Epigraphic Evidence: Ancient History from Inscriptions*, London and New York, 2002. Those in Rome should visit the superb new museum devoted to epigraphy in the former Baths of Diocletian.)

Archaeology is primarily concerned with the recovery of material culture and buildings and their interpretation as evidence of past human behaviour. (Colin Renfrew and Paul Bahn, *Archaeology, Theories, Methods and Practice*, sixth edition, London, 2012 covers in detail all the points made here.) Traditionally the archaeologist has dealt largely in stone, pottery, and metalwork, as these are the materials most likely to survive in a temperate or tropical climate. In recent years a much

wider range of materials, in particular those relating to plant and animal life, have proved recoverable, and so much more can be said about agriculture and diet, for instance. So the archaeologist is preoccupied with the vulnerability of the materials he deals with (archaeological excavation necessarily involves the destruction of the context in which artefacts are found), as the recent looting of sites in the Middle East reminds us. Virtually every bronze statue from the ancient world has been melted down, many for the value of their metals, others because, as ‘pagan idols’, they offended Christian sensibilities. It was only in the Renaissance that the urge to preserve an item because of its antiquity or aesthetic quality becomes a powerful force in Europe again with the result that ancient art begins to be idealized (see Chapter 36). Yet human destruction sometimes works in the archaeologist’s favour. The burning down of the palaces of the Ancient Near East hardened the clay tablets that were piled in their archives so that they have survived to be read! Even so the archaeologist is still normally left with only a small and unrepresentative sample of what originally existed.

There are certain features of life that are poorly documented in the texts—houses, the details of everyday living in the streets, the uses of public spaces and developments in technology are just three of them—and here the work of archaeologists has proved indispensable. Excavations and surveys along the borders of the Roman empire have revealed the successive programmes of fortification there as the empire came under the pressure of invasion. It has even proved possible to say something about political developments. Excavations in the Roman Forum have shown an increase in the space reserved for the public assemblies as the tribunes became more influential in the mid-second century BC, and a corresponding diminution in this space at the expense of that given to the senate house under the dictator Sulla. On the other hand, the impression given in Greek texts that cities were walled and graced with public buildings from early times has been shown to be false. It was often more than a hundred years after its foundation that a city acquired its first set of walls, and the spaces set aside for public buildings were then often still unfilled.

In a typical excavation layers of occupation are uncovered, the older ones below the more recent. If these layers can be dated—from coins, for instance—so can other material, such as pottery, found in the same layer. Similar pottery uncovered in other contexts can then be used for dating a layer of occupation. This has been particularly important in the study of pre-dynastic Egypt and the deep stratified pits of the Ancient Near East. The recent find of a sealed layer of eighth-century BC pottery and other material at Methone in the northern Aegean (see p. 155) is a textbook example of the datable site.

Coins provide some of the most useful archaeological evidence, often confirming or disputing other forms of evidence such as written texts. Coin hoards in Germany correspond almost exactly with details of the composition of such hoards given in Tacitus’ *Germania*. The distribution of coins helps plot trade routes or the passage of armies, their content is an indication of the resources available to the minter, and hence his patron, their reliefs show buildings that may have vanished. The way that emperors used coins as a means of propaganda is a field of study in itself. Occasionally, as in the

discovery of a coin at Chalgrove in Oxfordshire, UK, in 2003, they might provide the only record of an emperor, here 'Domitian II', a figure who appears to have briefly proclaimed himself an emperor on the northern frontiers of the Roman empire in AD 271. (See Christopher Howgego, *Ancient History from Coins*, London and New York, 1995, for an excellent introduction to the subject.)

A particularly important development has been underwater archaeology. It is an expensive and sometimes hazardous business, and added to the costs of excavation are those of the preservation of artefacts when on dry land, but the expansion has been spectacular, not only in the number of wrecks that have been plotted but the depths at which they can be identified, now up to 850 metres in the Mediterranean. The pioneering work of George Bass, founder of the Institute of Nautical Archaeology in Texas, has resulted in sophisticated ways of removing sediment, creating 3-D plans of hulls, and lifting heavy artefacts to the surface. The scale and direction of trade, which was mostly carried by water, can then be plotted. Harbours, among them Caesarea Maritima in Palestine and Alexandria in Egypt can also be explored. (See *The Oxford Handbook of Maritime Archaeology*, Oxford and New York, 2011, for a survey of developments. Seaborne trade in the Roman empire is covered below, pp. 528–31.)

Advances in scientific techniques have made the evaluation of evidence more precise. While radiocarbon dating has become ever more sophisticated and is now the best way of dating perishable materials, other methods have emerged. Trace elements in metals allow their origin to be pinpointed. Lead isotope analysis from lead, copper, and silver ores enables a particular find to be traced back to where it was originally mined. The distinctive 'oxhide' shape copper ingots of the Late Bronze Age found in many sites in the Aegean were made of metal mined in Cyprus. The earliest Athenian coins were made of silver from Thrace, not, as might be expected, from the Laurium mines near the city. The analysis of residues found in Roman amphorae has enabled their contents to be identified, while comparison of the stamps on the amphorae themselves has been used to map trade routes. (The wine amphorae of one potter, Sestius, whose name was stamped on the rim, were distributed probably from an estate in Cosa in Italy throughout central and southern France.) Dendrochronology, the analysis of tree rings, is an effective way of exploring climate from one year to the next and it has even been shown that the year 218 BC was a mild one, which helps explain why Hannibal was able to progress through the Alps into Italy that year!

The sophistication of, but also the difficulties presented by, such methods can be shown in the attempts to provide a date for the eruption on the Aegean island of Thera, which buried the thriving Minoan port of Acrotiri (luckily preserving it as fully as Pompeii). It is not merely a historical question—the eruption has been linked to legends of a vanished Atlantis that has inspired so many fantasies about 'lost civilizations'. At first a date of around 1500 BC was proposed. This was supported by datings from the pottery sequence and from pumice apparently from the eruption that had been found in a distinct Egyptian archaeological layer of this date at Tell el-Dab'a in the Nile delta. (For the excavations at Tell el-Dab'a see Chapter 4.)

However, radiocarbon dating on samples from Thera and the Aegean tended to suggest an earlier date—to between 1627 and 1600 BC with a 95 per cent probability that these dates were accurate. Then a dendrochronology based on tree rings from Californian bristlecone pines (the effect of the eruption would have been felt even this far afield as the dust in the atmosphere affects solar radiation) was used to fix a date specifically 1628–1626 BC and there is some evidence to support the same dates from tree rings in Anatolia. A major new programme of radiocarbon-14 dating for Tell el-Dab'a was then launched and this has produced some earlier dates that may eventually allow the consensus of scholarly opinion to settle on the last quarter of the seventeenth century BC. (For the wider historical context of the eruption, see p. 118 below.)

Traditionally the focus in classical archaeology has been on the large city sites or, in the Greek world, sanctuaries. In fact much of nineteenth-century European 'archaeology' was preoccupied with the rediscovery of the major sites (the German financier Heinrich Schliemann's assault on the site of Troy, launched in 1871, was one of the best publicized, while the German excavation of Olympia 1875–81 with its 500 workers set the model for the 'big dig') and the transport of their treasures to national museums in London, Paris, or Berlin. The Germans were able to carry off 350 tonnes of material from Pergamum, then sited in the decaying Ottoman empire, to Berlin as late as 1880.

Although much of value has been found—how could one write the history of Rome or Athens without extensive excavation on the sites?—the concentration of popular monuments or periods of history left important areas unresearched. There has been a shift of emphasis from the city to the countryside (where, after all, the majority of the population continued to live). The field survey (based on the collection of surface finds) has proved a relatively economical and efficient way of plotting the nature of settlement across a wide area. An important field survey was that carried out by the British School at Rome in southern Etruria. (It was prompted by the widespread destruction of the ancient landscape by modern farming methods and new building.) One result of this and other surveys of Republican Italy was to challenge the view put forward in the literary sources that peasant plots had disappeared in Italy in the second century BC. Field surveys in Greece have shown how small and unpredictable the surpluses of produce were, and how precarious, as a result, was the survival of city life. Evidence of the planting of olives has proved a good indicator of political stability as the trees take several years to mature and therefore are only planted when their maturity can be hoped for.

On urban sites the geophysical survey is particularly useful in plotting the traces of buildings. A good example is the major survey of the Roman city of Wroxeter, the fourth largest city of the province of Britannia. The city has never been reoccupied and it has proved possible to plot its outline, including industrial and market areas, and even to accumulate evidence, through discordant magnetic feedback, of destruction by fires, without any disturbance of the soil. Satellite archaeology is giving more sophisticated analyses of site, with many more being discovered in Egypt and

throughout the Roman empire. (See the work of Sarah Parcak at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.)

Field surveys, insofar as they are concerned with collecting and interpreting material, are carried out within the parameters of conventional archaeology. In the past thirty years, however, archaeologists have become much more ambitious in their objectives. The traditional approach was to accumulate evidence, describe it, and then use it to piece together a picture of the past. This inevitably produced a rather static picture of a society and one in which people often seemed less important than the objects they had left behind. The so-called 'New Archaeology' (a term originating in the United States in the 1960s) adopted a more proactive approach. The 'New Archaeologists' moved into the areas traditionally covered by anthropology. They were concerned to understand how individuals within a society related to each other and to the outside world and, in particular, how cultural change took place. They went to live among hunter-gatherer societies to observe patterns of living that might help explain the evidence left by similar societies of the past. They set up hypotheses and then examined a number of sites specifically to find evidence to support or disprove these hypotheses. They then attempted to put forward 'laws' of human behaviour. ('In such and such circumstances human societies turn from hunter-gathering to farming', for instance.)

The 'New Archaeologists' focused overwhelmingly on the environment, which they believed to be the main instigator of social change. (For example, new patterns of social cooperation might emerge if different food sources had to be exploited.) Their approach earned the name 'processual', from the emphasis given to isolating and studying the different 'processes' that conditioned social change. More recently, some archaeologists, particularly in Britain (Ian Hodder has been the pioneer), have found the 'processual' approach too functional. They claim that the emphasis on the environment underestimates the capacity of societies to make their own values and to sustain them, in particular through the manipulation of the cultural symbols that are important to them. This new approach has been termed 'post-processual'.

One risks losing sight of the traditional concerns of archaeology under the weight of these conceptualizations (and often they were promulgated in jargon which was incomprehensible to all but the most determined readers), but perhaps a synthesis has emerged which shows a deepened understanding of how societies create their own ideological framework within which cultural change takes place. So one might see how a new Roman emperor ensures his legitimacy by using symbols from great emperors of the past, one reason why Constantine, for instance, incorporated reliefs from monuments in honour of the earlier emperors Trajan, Hadrian, and Marcus Aurelius into his own triumphal arch in Rome.

A fine example of how cultural symbols might be used in the Greek world is provided by Andrew Stewart in his *Art, Desire and the Body in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, 1997) which reflects on the way in which the body was presented in sculpture and painting to the onlooker in order to reflect specific political and social ideals. There are ways of showing political heroes, the 'ideal' citizen or philosopher, and

the warrior hero. Even nudity had its own cultural contexts, being the ‘costume’ in which a hero, whether a victorious athlete or a challenger of tyranny, could be portrayed. A more focused use of art as propaganda is explored by Paul Zanker in his *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor, 1998). Zanker shows how certain images of traditional Roman life—the grand public building, for instance—were used by the emperor Augustus to sell himself as the restorer, not the destroyer, of the Roman republic. Every statue of himself was composed so that even the scenes on the breastplates (see the Prima Porta statue, below, p. 455) had a cultural significance which tied him to the past, while in the *Ara Pacis*, the Altar of Peace, Augustus is shown as a simple family man, offering sacrifices to the gods as his republican ancestors might have done. Political change could be achieved through the manipulation of cultural symbols, many of which held enormous emotive power. The term ‘cognitive archaeology’ has been coined to describe the attempt to create the mentality of the past from its surviving cultural objects.

This recovery of ‘mentality’ is one of the most difficult, if most fascinating, challenges for the ancient historian. What were the parameters within which thinking took place? It is a particularly difficult area in that it is virtually impossible to discard our own prejudices and cultural preconceptions enough to enter fully into the world of another. What did it mean for an Athenian to sit and listen to a tragedy and how far would he, or she, use the experience for emotional release or to more fully understand the ethical challenges that faced the city? To what extent did a citizen feel he was genuinely part of his city community—or was his public behaviour adopted for show, a series of learned experiences so that he would appear a perfect citizen to his fellows (see the example of Lucian in Chapter 29)? Why did the classical world have to wait so long before a writer felt able to explore his innermost thoughts as Augustine did in his *Confessions* in the AD 390s? How far, in general, could personal feelings be shown and if one felt emotionally disturbed how should this be dealt with? In his fine study *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford, 2000), Richard Sorabji shows how the Stoic philosophers were all too aware of the threat of stress in public life and how they evolved means of dealing with it. The study goes further to show how the impact of the outside world was transformed by Christians into specific temptations. Yet in what ways did Christians think differently from their pagan contemporaries? Are the *Confessions* of Augustine evidence that they did so or are they unique to their author?

There have been attempts to understand the mentalities of the ancient world through its surviving Greek and Roman mythologies. As every child knows, these are rich and varied. There remains, however, immense controversy over what myth can tell us about the society that produced it. There is some hesitation in using the myths of any culture to provide universal meaning—the search for understanding of a myth must start with the specific context in which it grew. (In other words Freud’s universalization of the Oedipus myth, taken from his play *Oedipus Rex*, must be treated with suspicion as there is no evidence that it shows a typical pattern of family behaviour in Greece, let alone any other culture.) The French anthropologist Claude

Lévi-Strauss, and his fellow ‘structuralists’, proposed that the world picture of any studied society could be mapped (‘structured’) in terms of defined objects and categories whose meanings and significance are expressed and defined through myth. A ‘Paris school’ led by J.-P. Vernant and P. Vidal Naquet has made elaborate interpretations of Greek myths, teasing any possible nuance of meaning from the surviving versions. A ‘British school’ has tended to be more pragmatic and less willing to assume that a story must have a purpose and every detail of a story a significance.

Yet myths do say something about the culture that produces them, and myths shared across scattered communities sustain cultural cohesion. In some cases myths are used to rationalize behaviour. The myth of Prometheus’ trick on Zeus provides a reason for preserving the meat from sacrifices for the participants to eat rather than dedicating it to the gods. Other myths, particularly those relating to the foundation of a city, may contain historical information. Others again portray the dilemmas of everyday life (whether loyalty to a family should come before loyalty to a city, for instance), presenting them in a ‘distanced’ form that might be easier for an audience to assimilate and assess. It is impossible to say, however, how far myths had the power to condition the way individuals behaved in their everyday lives.

One of the finest scholars of ‘mentalities’, here in the period known as Late Antiquity (c. AD 284–650), is Peter Brown, who transformed the study of the period with his *The World of Late Antiquity*, which first appeared in 1971. Brown’s extraordinary work in uncovering the liveliness of late Roman society (though perhaps at the cost of downplaying the wider political contexts) has continued to this day. His studies, in particular of the religious personalities of the age, not least among them Augustine where Brown’s biography (second edition, Berkeley and London, 2000) is probably the most intuitive of this brilliant but complex Christian intellectual to have been written, have extended to an exploration of the relationship between ‘the body’ and ‘society’ and the rise of ‘the holy man’ in this period.

Brown’s achievement has recently culminated in *Through the Eye of the Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550 AD* (Princeton and London, 2012). In this magisterial study, Brown turns an acute eye on the relationship between wealth, immense at the elite end of society, and Christian attitudes to it. He is particularly expert at placing each of his key figures, Ambrose of Milan, Paulinus of Nola, and Augustine among them, in their social context, always alert to the minute gradations of late Roman society and how traditional pagan attitudes of wealth overlapped with Christian approaches. He sifts through the surviving voices to highlight every nuance of feeling. No one has probed the interactions of the intellectual and social elite of this period with more insight into their relationships with each other and with their own selves.

In conclusion, there is one book that can be recommended as a preliminary to approaching the ancient world. Its subject is Bactria, one of the least known of the Greek kingdoms that emerged in the east after the conquests of Alexander. The kingdom was in what is now Afghanistan. Frank Holt, in *Lost World of the Golden King: In Search of Ancient Afghanistan* (Berkeley and London, 2012), explores what

is known of Bactria from the surviving sources. The earliest material evidence, of what was always a shadowy kingdom, came from a few coins, notably those of a king Eucratides the Great, who appears to have ruled the kingdom between the early and mid-second century BC. As a band of nineteenth-century enthusiasts explored the sites and accumulated ever more coins from Afghanistan (including a single example of the largest gold coin ever minted in the ancient world, the so-called Eucratidion, now in the Bibliothèque Impériale in Paris), there were attempts to create not just a sequence of kings (some forty names were eventually found recorded) but the relationships between them and even their personalities from the way they presented themselves on these coins. Imagination ruled supreme. A particularly speculative history, complete with devastating battles for which no evidence existed, was created by the Scottish classicist, W.W. Tarn (1869–1957), well known for his idealization of Alexander the Great. Tarn filled gaps in the record with complete, if unjustified, confidence.

The first lesson Holt tells us, therefore, is how easy it is to invent history from limited sources, breathing life into fragments of evidence that may themselves have been poorly interpreted. It is a telling point. At any stage in the study of the ancient world, interpretations depend on limited evidence and even when new discoveries are made, they are often made to fit existing frameworks rather than providing the possibility of rethinking the whole issue. Gradually more evidence of ancient Bactria has been accumulated. There have been excavations in Afghanistan, of course, notably of the modern site Ai Khanoum, carried out by the French archaeologist Paul Bernard between 1965 and 1978. Ai Khanoum (its ancient name is still unknown) occupied a strong defensive position on the border of Bactria but also became prosperous from the fertility of the surrounding land and mineral wealth. There is no doubt that this was an important city and had a core of fine Greek buildings and inscriptions but, Holt would argue, there has been a tendency, in the tradition of Tarn, to play up its ‘Greekness’ and to present it somehow as a beacon of civilization. This approach was put into reverse in 1979 when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan and, in their own excavations, refused to follow the imperialist model, preferring to reconstruct the history of the region in terms of its ethnic peoples rather than highlighting the ‘civilization’ brought by the Greeks. So does politics frame the presentation of the past and even the way resources are directed towards its rediscovery. The past is always defined by the present.

Ai Khanoum succumbed to invaders, possibly nomads, at what appears to be the final years of king Eucratides, about 145 BC. Stories that there had been a great defeat of Eucratides in battle are not upheld by any evidence of destruction on the site, which appears, rather, to have been abandoned. Since the excavations the city has again fared badly through extensive looting. Holt charts with dismay the destruction of Afghanistan’s heritage since the 1980s and the continual rumours of newly found hoards of ancient coins which, stripped from the context in which they were unearthed, appear coin by coin on the open market.

One of the most interesting initiatives that Holt takes with the ancient coins that survive for inspection is to analyse them through what he calls ‘cognitive

numismatics, the study of who made the coins and how they were used. He shows, for instance, that the planning of the designs of coins was often rudimentary. Even the lettering on the great Eucratidion was poorly placed. Then there were numerous mistakes in the Greek that continued uncorrected. The conclusion was that the whole process of making coins was badly supervised and in some reigns supervision seemed to lapse completely. Did this suggest a kingdom losing its vigour or does it highlight the high number of non-Greek speakers who were responsible for minting the coins? This cognitive approach allows a whole range of new questions to be explored which may provide a deeper understanding of a kingdom that still lurks in obscurity. There is much to learn from Frank Holt's book about how the past is, at any one moment, a provisional construction owing as much to ideology and speculation as to the detached assembly and interpretation of the different types of evidence.

The ancient Mediterranean remains a place of great cultural complexity and its re-creation in the hands of historians has become all the more of a challenge as a mass of new evidence emerges to displace the primacy of the major classical texts. The danger is that increasing specialization will isolate different disciplines from each other so that the wider picture of the foundations of the western world becomes fragmented. It is the hope of this book to hold together, even if only at an introductory level, the picture as a whole.

2

The Birth of Civilization

The Ancient Near East, 5000–1200 BC

The word ‘culture’ is one of those terms that needs to be handled with caution. Its definition has varied over time and with context. In a very broad sense it concerns shared values and traditions that are passed on in some coherent form from one generation to another in a society. These might include a body of knowledge and beliefs, including moral behaviour, styles of art, patterns of relationships, and ways of conducting government, the specific aspects of a society by which it may be distinguished from another.

Cultures are seldom frozen—it is simply not possible for a culture to remain unaffected by changing political and economic conditions—but often cultural symbols, such as specific gods or rituals and depictions of kingship, are used again and again by rulers or ruling classes in order to reassert authority or establish their legitimacy. These symbols become important rallying cries when a culture is under threat. It is normal, however, for cultures to be in a tension between forces for change and forces for continuity. In some areas, as with an open sea like the Mediterranean or one with many trade networks, there is continuous cultural interchange. Incoming cultures can be welcomed and adapted by their recipients or emphatically rejected by them. Cultures can collapse completely or be transformed into something virtually unrecognizable from what went before. Massive if slow transformations of the Mediterranean world took place, for instance, with the expansion of the Roman empire and, later, with the coming of Christianity and Islam as life was shaped to new purposes. A crucial, and challenging task for the historian is to understand how and why cultural change takes place. This becomes particularly difficult when there is only the chance survival of artefacts, pottery, or metal goods, whose original purpose, purely functional, perhaps, or ritualistic, is impossible to recover.

Just as a clear definition of what is meant by a ‘culture’ is not easy to make, so it is difficult to say what gives a particular culture the status of a ‘civilization’. The word ‘civilization’ suggests cultural and political superiority, an attitude adopted by the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans as they compared themselves to other ‘barbarian’ peoples around them. Yet as every culture tends to think itself superior to its neighbours, it is important to move beyond such value judgements to give a broader definition of ‘civilization’ that can provide the setting for the cultures discussed in this book. Crucial to the notion of ‘civilization’ is political and cultural stability and this

normally means a state, a defined territory over which a king, a religious ruler, or some other form of government, claims control. From earliest times civilization and city life have appeared to be inseparable, although what sustains urban living varies. A city may be founded as a religious centre, the focus for the worship of a god, or as the setting in which a ruler displays himself, often through monumental buildings. Many settlements gain their energy from trading, and so exist primarily as centres where people meet to buy and sell, where goods are unloaded from water, or where trade routes cross. Often functions overlap—a capital may become a port or a ruler draw his authority from the ancient religious meaning of a site. In a trading city there are opportunities for craftsmen to transfer raw materials into textiles, metal implements, or works of art for the elite, so manufacturing quarters grow up, often close to the market-place, and there are finished goods to be sold back to visiting traders. In short, civilizations usually show social complexity and specialized skills.

In order to survive the inhabitants of cities spawn creative solutions. They have to, in order to deal with the administration of day-to-day survival, when so many have to be fed and given fresh water, and their waste (and dead bodies!) safely removed. The rules of trading need to be regulated, order imposed through a defined authority, the ruler, his officials, or even the people themselves. Records have to be kept and so means of transferring information into a permanent, comprehensible form, writing, develops. The one who does the writing, the storehouse keeper or an elite class of scribes, and the functions of writing vary from culture to culture. The city reinforces its own status through its buildings. Its walls may be as much a mark of its power as a means of defence. (This was certainly true of ancient Mesopotamia where the normal and often exaggerated boast of conquerors was that they had destroyed an enemy city's walls even if archaeological evidence shows that they had not!) As many examples from Egypt and the Near East show, walls provide an excellent setting for reliefs that can proclaim the power of a ruler or his gods. Yet a city is more than its rulers. The interaction of the people themselves encourages the exchange of ideas and their diffusion. So begins the lively interchange of cultures that will be such an important theme of this book.

No city can exist if it does not draw on surpluses of food and in most cases this comes from the surrounding land. Civilization and the control of food surpluses go hand in hand, but the process of accumulation can occur in different ways. A state may have control over valued sources, tin, silver, iron ores, which it can trade for food. It may win resources through war and then use them to fuel further expansion. It may simply develop a highly efficient bureaucracy centred on the king that channels surpluses up to his court in 'taxation' (as in ancient Egypt). One of the underlying questions that has to be asked of all the civilizations in this book is how surplus was accumulated and used to sustain the civilization discussed.

For the Mediterranean world the beginnings of civilization are normally placed in the Ancient Near East. (The term is generally used by scholars of these ancient cultures, despite the preferred Middle or Near East today.) The Ancient Near East is defined here as covering the area which now stretches from Turkey eastwards across to the Caspian Sea and southwards from there to take in modern Iran and Iraq. In

the south-west it includes the modern Syria, Israel, Jordan, and the Lebanon. In the period covered here and in Chapter 6 there were major centres of civilization in Mesopotamia, Palestine, Phoenicia, to the north of Palestine (the modern Lebanon), Syria, and Anatolia, on the central plain of modern Turkey. Egypt, although comparatively isolated within the Nile valley, was in continuous interaction with the area. As its civilization had many unique features it will be dealt with separately.

The legacy of this area both to the other civilizations of the ancient world and to the modern world is immense. It includes the earliest examples of settled agriculture, the first cities and temples, and with them systems of administration that fostered the emergence of writing. The alphabet originated in the Levant in about 1500 BC. The world's first kingdoms and empires, the beginnings of metalwork, and building in brick are found in Mesopotamia. Three major world religions, the only monotheistic ones, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, have originated in the area. As the civilizations of the Ancient Near East were not isolated from each other nor from the outside world, all these developments spread to the Mediterranean world and beyond. The extensive records kept by Babylonian mathematicians and astronomers entered the Greek world in the third century BC and the data allowed the plotting of the movements of the stars over time. Even so one must be careful not to see the cultures of the Ancient Near East as inevitable precursors of western civilization. The complexity of the relationships over centuries of interaction will be stressed throughout this book.

The landscape of the Near East is a varied and often formidable one. In southern Iraq there were marshes (although much of the Iraqi marshland has been drained in recent years), in Jordan and Syria desert, in Iran mountains topped with snow. In southern Mesopotamia there is a flat plain rich in silt brought down by the Tigris and Euphrates (the name Mesopotamia itself comes from the Greek for 'between two rivers'). To the north and east of the plain lie mountain ranges, whose melting snows provide these two rivers with their annual floods. There are high plateaux—Anatolia, 500 metres above sea level, and Iran with its inhospitable central deserts—and more mountain ranges, north and south of Anatolia and along the Lebanese coast. These different environments have hosted both sophisticated city-states and nomadic peoples whose relationships with each other have added to the complexity of the area's history. The more resilient Near East economies combined cereal production, and thus a settled population, with pastoralism, the husbanding of goats, sheep, and cattle. Typically, successful city-states of the Ancient Near East grasped a territory around them and consolidated their position through the control of trade, often over routes that remained unchanged for centuries. It was a precarious existence, there were few easily defensible borders, and many states collapsed after only a century or two. However, it was probably just this changing pattern of cultures that made the area such a rich source of innovation.

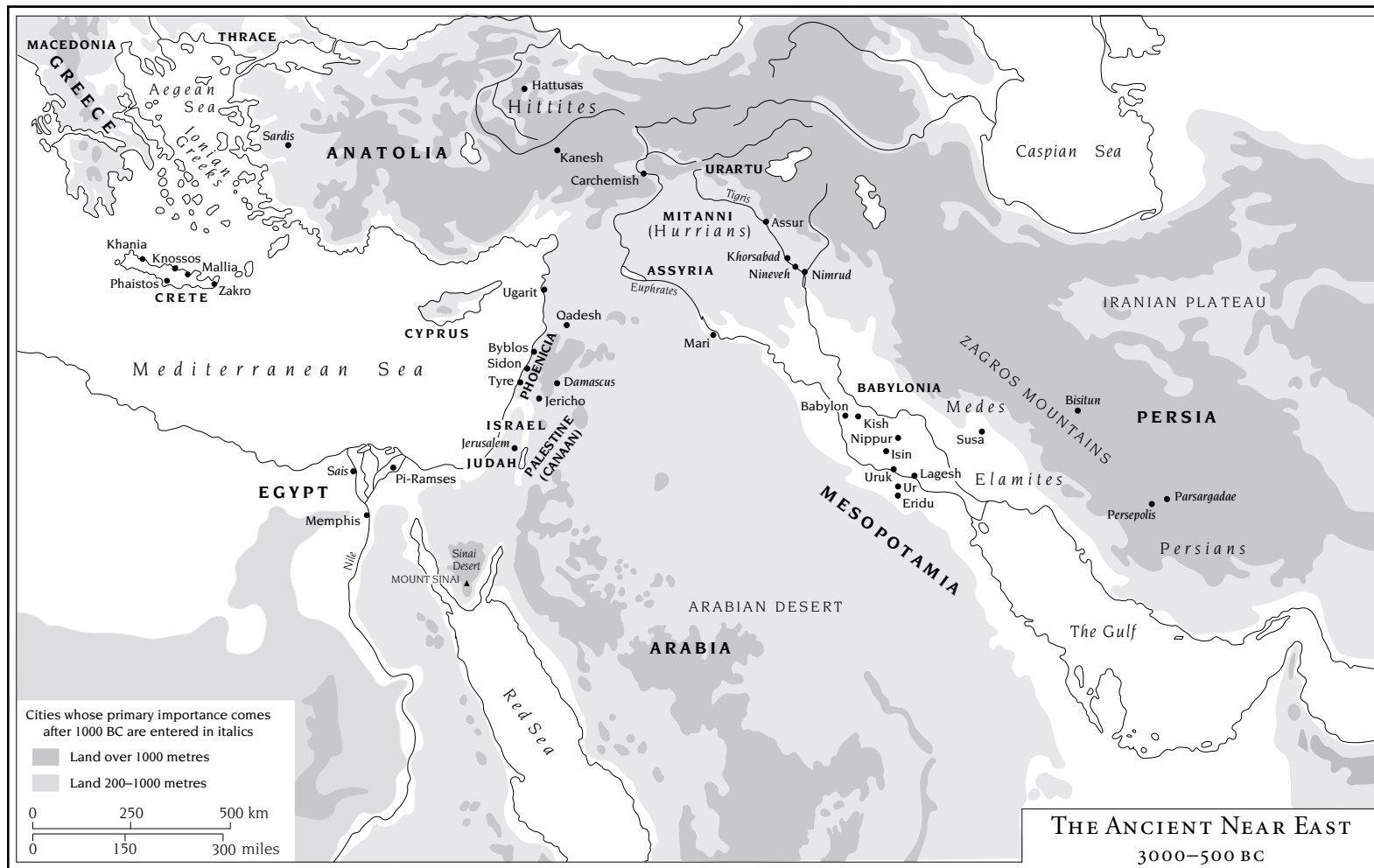
The rediscovery of the Ancient Near East by the west began in the nineteenth century. The pioneers were a mixture of European diplomats, gentleman scholars, soldiers, and colonial administrators, and this was when these ancient cultures were

appropriated into a story of 'western civilization'. (The late Edward Said has explored this appropriation critically in his influential *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, London, 1978.) The motives of the pioneers were varied but among the most important were the determination to prove the truth of the Bible through finding evidence for its accuracy as history and to accumulate collections of treasures for their own national museums. The great palaces of Assyria, Khorsabad, Nimrud, and Nineveh were stripped of their magnificent reliefs, which are now to be found in British and French museums.

One of the major discoveries, by British archaeologists in the second half of the nineteenth century, was the vast library of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal at Nineveh with its collection of Mesopotamian literature. The cuneiform script in which the tablets were written was eventually deciphered from a trilingual inscription carved by the Persian king Darius on a rock at Behistun by an Englishman, Henry Rawlinson (1810–95). The literature and complex history of the region could now start to be unravelled. A decisive moment came in 1872 when George Smith, working on Assyrian tablets in the British Museum, found a text describing a great flood and instantly placed the biblical texts in a wider cultural context. Now the ever-increasing numbers of tablets and a more sophisticated understanding of the contexts in which they were written has added immeasurably to our knowledge of the region and its history.

Sites in Mesopotamia may have been occupied over 6,000 years and the accumulated remains are enormous. The citadel of one city, Nineveh, is so huge that it is estimated that it would take another 6,000 years to excavate it according to modern methods. It also became obvious that concentrating digs on such massive sites gave a false impression of Mesopotamian culture especially when there were still traditions of 'treasure-hunting', that highlighted prestige finds over the more mundane debris of everyday living. The impact of a broader, more anthropological, approach pioneered by American scholars such as Robert Braidwood in the 1940s forced archaeologists to concentrate on what it was actually like to live in ancient Mesopotamia. Surveys of larger areas showed how individual cities and settlements were linked to each, often through canals. Here the American Robert Adams was a pioneer with his survey of 8,000 square kilometres of Diyala province in eastern Iraq in the 1960s. In the cities themselves, meticulous examination of ordinary houses, such as the Abu Salabikh project in southern Iraq, a relatively small but well-preserved city site from the third millennium BC, is shifting interest towards ordinary lives.

In recent years, major irrigation and building projects have threatened the survival of many sites. A major blow, the full extent of which is still unknown, to the history of the Ancient Near East, has been dealt as a result of the looting on ancient sites in the aftermath of the invasions of Iraq and the breakdown of order in other states. (According to one survey, the holes in Iraq add up to 3,700 acres of destruction.) Major museums in the region have been looted; even some of the treasures of Tutankhamun in the Cairo Museum were damaged or disappeared in January 2011. Sites are hard to protect and small antiquities easy to dig out and smuggle out to unscrupulous dealers. With the sequence of events and details of daily living of so



MAP 1

many of these cultures still obscure, this is a devastating loss. Work on many important projects has been interrupted and only now, 2012 at the time of writing, are the first archaeological excavations being resumed in Iraq.

Mesopotamia and the First Cities

Mesopotamia is a loose term that denotes the region that covers the watersheds of the rivers Euphrates and Tigris as they flow down to what is now the Persian Gulf. It was at the southern end of the Mesopotamian plain that the earliest of the city-states appeared. The Akkadian (Akkadian was a Semitic language used in the area from about 2600 BC) word for this part of Mesopotamia was *Sumerum* and this gives the name Sumerian to this early civilization and its language. There are problems. Sumerian, a language of monosyllabic words, is hard to place as it seems unrelated to any other language of the region and its origin is unknown. Again, it is difficult to distinguish specific features of Sumerian culture that isolate it from others, so here Sumerian will be used broadly to define the world of the city-states of this region that emerged in about 3500 BC and lasted until 2300 BC. (For general background reading for this chapter, see 'What to Read Next', pp. 683–4.)

At first sight the plain did not appear to be a likely home for a stable civilization. There were few natural resources, no timber, stone, or metals. Rainfall was limited, and what water there was rushed across the plain in the annual flood of melted snow. As the plain fell only 20 metres in 500 kilometres the beds of the rivers shifted constantly. Yet this impelled the inhabitants to organize their irrigation effectively, by building canals and preserving water before it flowed onwards. Once this was done and the silt carried down by the rivers planted with crops, the rewards were rich: four to five times what rain-fed earth would produce. It was these conditions that allowed an elite to emerge, probably as an organizing class, and to sustain itself through the control of surplus crops that could be used in exchange for the raw materials that it lacked. In short, the need to survive forced innovative responses.

The mountains of accumulated remains that mark ancient sites are known as *tells*. An especially prominent one is Eridu. The site was/is close to the Euphrates but at the intersection of marsh, desert, and alluvial soil that gave it access to both farmland and fishing with some scope for pastoralism. It had a constant supply of water that was accumulated in a depression in the ground. This lake appears to have given it a sacred quality. As excavators dug down through the *tell* in the 1940s they began uncovering a sequence of temples, one superimposed on the other. They eventually found a small 'chapel' built of sun-dried brick on a base of undisturbed sand. It was dated, astonishingly, to 4900 BC. Each subsequent temple was larger than the one before and the final temples, of the third millennium BC, had massive platforms, with open courts in the centre surrounded by rooms. The corners of the buildings were orientated to points of the compass and the mudbrick walls supported by buttresses. The period that ends in about 3500 BC is known as the Ubaid, from a site of this period excavated in the 1920s, Tell Ubaid, near Ur. (These names

for periods tend to stick even when more important sites from the same period are discovered.)

The sequence of buildings implies that once a site had been given religious significance this was reinforced from generation to generation. The larger and later temples showed that they had been centres of ritual worship and that worshippers had brought simple offerings such as fish (again perhaps reinforcing the sacredness of water and all it gave life to) and other agricultural produce as offerings or for exchange. Pottery dishes suggested that communal meals had been part of the rituals. The god worshipped at Eridu appears to have been Enki, the creator god who shaped the world and who embodied wisdom. Well might later Babylonian texts talk of the creation of Eridu as the first city, 'the holy city, the dwelling of their [the other gods] delight'.

A cemetery was found close by the temple complex and the excavation of graves dating from about 3800 BC suggests that it was reserved for an elite. Their grave goods were well crafted and some, such as obsidian beads and the intensely blue stone, lapis lazuli, had come long distances. Older burials had been marked and preserved. The assumption is that this elite was somehow associated with the maintenance of the temples and gained privileges and veneration after death as a result. Eridu, which was the southernmost of the Mesopotamian settlements, may have been, in fact, primarily a centre for pilgrimage. Its mythological links to creation and its association with permanent supplies of water, so yearned for in the desert, preserved its status so that modern Iraqi governments still see it as the founding city of their civilization. More recent excavations of other sites suggest, however, that similar shrines were to be found at other centres of the period. This was a culture that enjoyed some uniformity in religious practice. Pottery too is decorated in similar styles across the Ubaid culture.

Eridu could hardly be called a city in the full sense of the word but its neighbour Uruk, to the north-west, has a better claim. The most significant period in Uruk's transformation is between 3800 and 3200 BC. From about 3500 its population was too great to sustain itself from local resources and so there must have been some coercive control of other areas. This was helped by climate change that led to less flooding and the release of fertile land for cultivation. The opportunities were grasped by an enterprising elite. Uruk's rise in status is reflected in a mass of monumental building, in stone and a primitive concrete for some periods, in mudbrick for others. This suggests a disciplined workforce working over long periods. Bevelled-rim bowls of fixed capacity are abundant and may have contained the agreed daily rations for a worker.

What is remarkable is that architectural styles change when rebuilding takes place—there is no attempt to perpetuate the same style of building—although there are enduring design features such as attractively coloured clay cones which were set into walls and pillars. So this was a people who were happy to innovate, and hand in hand with this goes evidence of more sophisticated bureaucratic skills. Officials had their own seals, their individually chosen designs inscribed on cylinders that could then be rolled across damp clay to identify goods of which they were owners

or for which they were responsible. Their quality confirms that they were incised by trained craftsmen. A primitive form of writing, again inscribed on damp clay, was used to record goods, administrative decisions, and the use of labour. Some signs were simply representations of the commodity itself, an ear of corn, water, or numbers of containers (these are known as logograms). The evidence that this was an ordered society is reflected in the Warka (Warka is the modern Arabic name for the site) vase in which a procession of naked men carry containers of goods in some form of ritual procession probably associated with Inanna, the goddess of love and war. Other depictions from cylinders show captives paraded before kings.

The development of Uruk, a site that eventually covered some 550 hectares, about half the size of Rome at its height in AD 100, goes hand in hand with the diffusion of artefacts that appear to have originated in Uruk, such as the distinctive bevelled-rim bowls, far beyond southern Mesopotamia, into southern Anatolia and northern Syria. There were also trading links with Egypt that provided cultural models at a time when different groups in Egypt were consolidating their control of the Nile valley (see further p. 40). What does this tell us about the nature of Uruk society? Did the opportunism that led to the exploitation of agricultural resources transform it into an imperialist state that set up colonial outposts in the north that acted as centres for the control of trade? Uruk settlements include Habuba Kabira, a totally new foundation on the Middle Euphrates, and Hacinebi Tepe where a Uruk enclave existed alongside an Anatolian culture for 400 years. Or was it a state whose economic structure was more egalitarian, with relatively little in the way of a hierarchy, which simply organized its trading activities more efficiently than its rivals, so 'dumping' surplus food in return for metals, luxuries, or slaves? (Slavery is impossible to track in the archaeological record but, as will be seen later in this book, was endemic in the ancient world.) The easy access to the ceremonial buildings and the generous open spaces in the centre of the city do suggest a relaxed society. The contrast with the enclosed temple sanctuaries of Egypt is marked. Nor was there any attempt to reuse traditional styles of architecture as a means of ensuring continuity with the cultural symbols of earlier eras.

So Uruk was home to an innovative society that was dedicated to promoting and sustaining an economy based on exchange, possibly using its public spaces for rituals celebrating the fact. Surviving 'lists of professions' show a hierarchy of officials and defined professions, priests, potters, and jewellers among them. Of the two leading administrative officials, one was a man (*en*) and the other a woman (*nin*). Perhaps Uruk's greatest achievement was to find ways of sustaining its economic vigour over centuries. However, in about 3100 BC its trading links disappear, perhaps, it is suggested, because the water supplies around Uruk began to dry up or the land was so intensively cultivated that the rural economy necessary to support the city collapsed. Outlying cultural outposts such as Habuba Kabira simply disappear and the older cultural traditions of northern Mesopotamia reassert themselves. Yet the precedent for city life had been set and as Uruk contracted, many smaller city-states emerged, each exploiting its own access to water and surrounding land.

The use of writing had now become a feature of many of these Mesopotamian city-states. As suggested above, the earliest script was based on logograms, symbols that are used to express a whole word. Two thousand logograms have been recorded from these early centuries of writing and insofar as many represented what it was wished to record (an ear of corn for corn, for instance), they were relatively easy to read and could be comprehensible across different language groups, an important consideration so far as a trading state such as Uruk was concerned. About 3000 BC, however, writing is found expressed in Sumerian. As already noted the origins of the Sumerians are obscure and their language has no links with any other known language but it clearly had some kind of status so that for centuries texts written in Sumerian were considered superior to those in other languages.

Hand in hand with the adoption of Sumerian came an important development, the use of Sumerian words of one syllable (which was common in the language) in longer words where the sound of that syllable was needed. To take an example: the Sumerian word for 'head' was *sag*. Whenever a word including a syllable with the sound *sag* was to be written, the sign for *sag* could be used to express that syllable with the remaining syllables of the word expressed by other signs. So, in a first move towards the limited number of symbols of an alphabet, the number of signs required had been reduced, to 600 by 2300 BC, and the range of words which could be expressed had widened. Complications remained. Scribes had to make clear whether the *sag* sign was the whole word 'head' or part of a longer word. Texts dealing with economic matters predominated, as they always had done, but now works of theology, literature, history, and law appear. The writing was no longer incised (on damp clay tablets) with a pointed stylus but one with a wedge shape at its end. (The Romans called the shape *cuneus* and this gives the script its name of cuneiform.) Gradually the signs diverged from their pictorial roots and became more abstract but it is remarkable that the changes spread uniformly between cities suggesting the continuing importance of trade links between them. Texts found in a large cache of tablets at Shuruppak, north-west of Uruk, show that six neighbouring cities of the period worked well together, even raising men from each to work on communal projects and allowing each other's citizens free access to their territories. Cuneiform could be used to express any language, just as Latin script can be used today for different European languages. (See Andrew Robinson, *Writing and Script: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, 2009, for these early scripts and Dominique Charpin, *Reading and Writing in Babylon*, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 2010, for a wide-ranging study of the writing process.)

Analysis of the texts from Shuruppak suggests a conservative society. A father exhorts his son not to drink or consort with prostitutes or even to speak in public to a woman he is not married to. He should respect those of higher social status, protect his family, and work the land carefully. In other texts there is an emphasis on lists—of fish, birds, plants, officials, or even mathematical terms. These lexical lists, as they are known, were arranged according to the relative status of subjects (higher officials before lower ones, the sheep as the highest of animals, this

suggesting the importance of wool in the community). They reflect the desire to define order, the imposition of an ideal of society that would have been absorbed by all those being trained to write. So writing here transcends administrative functions and becomes a means of transmitting an ideology.

Other innovations of the late fourth millennium include the wheel, probably developed first as a more efficient way of making pottery and then transferred to transport. A tablet incised about 3000 BC provides the earliest known example, a roofed box-like sledge mounted on four solid wheels. A major development was the discovery, again about 3000 BC, that if copper, which had been known in Mesopotamia since about 3500, was mixed with tin, a much harder metal, bronze, would result. Bronze was far more successful than copper in creating sharp edges to cut anything, from crops and wood to human bodies, and it had the extra advantage that its melting point was very much lower than that of copper and the solidifying point of the molten metal even lower than that. This made it much easier to cast. The period from 3000–1000 BC (when the use of iron becomes widespread) is normally referred to as the Bronze Age. Bronze-working spread right across Europe and, even when iron replaced bronze for weapons and tools, bronze remained important for statues and ceremonial goods. The Greeks achieved an extraordinary proficiency in statuary by the fifth century BC.

The use of bronze requires access to copper and tin sources and these now became important. The people of Sumer probably imported their tin from mines in central Asia. It was one strand of a busy network of trade routes, some running north and south along the rivers, others eastwards through the city of Susa on the edge of the Iranian plateau to Afghanistan, the source of lapis lazuli. Timber and aromatics came from the mountains of Turkey and Syria, granite and dolerite from Egypt, cedarwood from the mountains of Lebanon. The sophistication of Sumer's society can be seen in the finds made in the so-called Royal Cemetery of the city of Ur by the British archaeologist Leonard Woolley in the 1920s and 1930s. (Woolley was able to exploit Britain's administrative control of Iraq after the collapse of the Ottoman empire and the best finds were transferred to the British Museum.) The richest of the graves, which date from around 2500 BC, contain what appear to be cult figures of men and women (there is no firm evidence that they are actually kings or queens), buried with other bodies around them. There is a mass of finely crafted goods, harps and lyres fashioned in inlaid wood, gaming boards, drinking cups, and jewellery in gold and silver. The so-called Standard of Ur, one of the finest discoveries, is a two-sided sounding box with scenes of war on one side and peace on the other, beautifully inlaid with shell and lapis lazuli. The relationship between the elite corpses and those around them has been the subject of fierce debate. Woolley constructed an elaborate explanation based on royal attendants being drugged and then laid alongside their masters in a single ceremonial burial. More recently it has been thought that the cult figures had such prestige that others wished their bodies to be buried as close to them as possible at the time of death (as, later, Christians would do at the shrines of saints and martyrs).

The plains of Mesopotamia were not peaceful. Ceremonial weapons of gold were found among the finery of the Royal Graves of Ur, suggesting a high status for those successful in war. On the so-called Vulture stele from the city of Lagesh (like the Royal Graves dated possibly to about 2500 BC), a king is portrayed first in a wheeled battle-wagon leading ranks of helmeted infantry and then a second time with the infantry striding over a defeated enemy. The city leaders were not necessarily all war chieftains—some of the terms used to describe them refer to them as religious or administrative rulers—but there is no doubt that this was an age of increasing inter-city rivalry and conflict. The emergence of war leaders is associated with northern Mesopotamia where the Euphrates and the Tigris come closest to each other, the later Babylonia. The riverbeds are stable and land routes well established. It was control and defence of this area that was vital and this required new forms of leadership. The city of Kish, well placed between both rivers, has one of the first recorded kings, one Mesilim, who ruled in about 2600 BC. He is given divine parentage and is recorded as having demarcated a territory.

So it is that palaces now become more prominent in the cities. At Kish, the entrance of the palace was fronted by fortified towers and surrounded by a perimeter wall. There is evidence of growing inequality in society notably in the contrast between the houses of the rich and the poor, and a system of rations appears in which the amount given out depends on the status of the recipient. Slavery makes its first appearance in the written record, with female slaves recorded as working as spinners and weavers in the temple workshops. There are documents from the courts in which slaves dispute their status. (A good overview of the fragmentary evidence is to be found in Daniel Snell, 'Slavery in the Ancient Near East', in Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge (eds.), *The Cambridge History of World Slavery*, i: *The Ancient Mediterranean World*, Cambridge, 2011.)

As seen in Chapter 1, one of the trends of epigraphy has been a shift from a literal translation of documents or inscriptions towards more nuanced interpretations of them as public relations exercises. Texts from Sumer in the late third millennium were often inscribed on slabs or statues and displayed in temples for all to see. They evoke an image of society in which the ruler is upheld as the chosen one of the gods, who maintains peace and security for all and sustains prosperity, not least as an overseer of irrigation. Cities flourish under his rule and the population grows under his 'shepherding'. (This image of the Good Shepherd reappears throughout the ancient world and is eventually incorporated into Christianity.) This may well have been idealization but the first law codes suggest that there may have been some reality in the picture of the benign ruler. The earliest surviving code, that of Urukagina, ruler of Lagesh about 2350 BC, seems aimed at restricting the power of the bureaucrats and wealthy landowners. The poor are protected against their excesses and there is evidence from Sumer in general that a system of law operated, with courts and respected local citizens sitting as judges.

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* (see further below) contributes the idea that the king is a superior being created as such by the god Ea and the Mother Goddess.

Ea opened his mouth to speak, saying a word to the Lady of the Gods: 'You are Belet-ili, the mistress of the great gods. You have created man the human. Fashion now the king, the counsellor-man. Gird the whole of his figure sweet. Make perfect his countenance and well formed his body!' The Lady of the Gods fashioned the king, the counsellor man. They gave to the king the task of doing battle for the great gods. Anu gave him his crown, Enlil gave him his throne, Nergal gave him his weapons, Ninurta gave him his corona of splendour, The Lady of the Gods gave him his features of majesty, Nuska commissioned counsellors, stood them before him. (Translation: Andrew George)

The rise of an ordered kingship was a development with immense implications for later history. Throughout the following centuries, with the Hellenistic kingships, the pagan Roman emperors, and then the Byzantine emperors, this emphasis on the ruler as the chosen of the gods, whether pagan or, in the case of the Byzantine emperor, Christian, reasserts itself. In each case success in war is intrinsic to the rulers' survival, as it clearly is here.

The Akkadians

Continuing conflict between the cities was debilitating and made the southern plains vulnerable to outsiders. In about 2330 BC southern Mesopotamia was conquered by history's first recorded emperor, Sargon of Akkade. Sargon's origins were among the Semitic-speaking peoples of the north. (One legend records that his mother, a priestess, placed him in a wicker basket and left him to float downstream where he was rescued. There are obvious parallels here with the story of Moses, an indication of how these legends spread and reappear within the Near East. Another tells of his having come to power as the result of an upheaval in the palace at Kish where he was serving as a royal cupbearer.) The site of Sargon's capital, Akkade, lay possibly at the junction of the Tigris and Diyala rivers, in a suburb of modern Baghdad. It seems to have acted as a focus for trade routes and attracted a cosmopolitan population. The text of the so-called Curse of Akkad talks of 'foreigners cruising about like unusual birds in the sky' and monkeys, elephants, buffalo, ibexes, and sheep 'jostling each other in the public square'. At the height of the city's prosperity it abounds in gold, silver, copper, and tin and 'blocks' of that most precious commodity of all, lapis lazuli.

From this bustling metropolis Sargon created an empire that stretched as far north as Anatolia and east as the Iranian plateau. Uruk was among the cities subdued by his armies, its walls broken down and its ruler, Lugalzagesi, taken off north in triumph. The walls of Ur too were destroyed. Sargon and his successors idealized kingship by presenting themselves in reliefs as dominant over their enemies who are shown as tiny in comparison to their semi-divine conquerors (compare the Narmer Palette, p. 42). Akkadian, a Semitic language, eventually became the dominant language of the empire and most surviving cuneiform documents are written in it. Sumerian remained distinct as the language of the priesthood and religious texts.

The extent of surviving written texts for the Akkadian empire marks an important moment in history, when a civilization is known more fully through its texts than its archaeology. These texts contain a dating system, a year being marked by a major event that took place in it. Yet while Akkade is well represented in the texts, its site is still unconfirmed and it is hard to distinguish a distinct Akkadian culture through artefacts. There are tales of conquests and campaigns but the structure of control is obscure. Sargon's empire was based primarily on personal conquest and needed to be continually reinforced through battle against both internal and external enemies. The evidence suggests that some defeated kings were allowed to continue in post as provincial governors but the number of local revolts suggests that this approach did not work well. The empire eventually fell apart seventy years later during the rule of Sargon's great-grandson, Shar-kali-sharri, when invaders, the Gutians, swept down the Zagros mountains to destroy the rich city of the plain. The Curse of Akkad tells how the god Enlil withdrew his protection from the city and the Gutians destroyed the trade routes and scattered the flocks. 'For the first time since cities were built and founded, the vast fields did not produce grain, the inundation ponds produced no fish, the irrigated orchard yielded neither syrup nor wine.'

The beneficiaries of this collapse of power in the north were the southern cities of Mesopotamia, now able to regain their independence (a sign in itself that Akkadian control had not been crushing). After some decades of turmoil, the Sumerians achieved one final burst of glory. In the so-called Third Dynasty of Ur (c.2150–2004 BC) a highly efficient bureaucratic state emerged in southern Mesopotamia under one Ur-Nummu and his son Shulgi. Shulgi glorified himself. 'When I sprang up, muscular as a cheetah, galloping like a thoroughbred at full speed, the favour of the [sky-god] An brought me joy.' The dynasty is remembered for its ziggurats, massive stepped platforms ascended by ramps. It is possible that they were symbolic homes of the gods, whose preservation high in shrines above any conceivable flood ensured the psychological well-being of all. Even though the upper layers of the ziggurats have now disappeared they were well built with an outer layer of baked brick steeped in bitumen to give it strength and rush matting placed between layers to spread the weight of the brick and absorb moisture. The ziggurats speak of the dominance of the gods who are used by the rulers to ensure their survival. The so-called royal hymns from Ur stress the respect shown by rulers for the gods and their role in leading the main ceremonies of the city, some of which were probably held on the summits of the ziggurats. Like most religious texts they were written in Sumerian and may even have been used as a ritualistic means of preserving distance between ruler and ruled. One of the most attractive features of the hymns is the value given to musical accomplishment.

The extent of the surviving texts is vast and varied. The literature of the Dynasty included the earliest recorded epic, that of Gilgamesh, a warrior king of Uruk. (Although the epic dates from this time, the version that survives is several hundred years later and it is not certain what transformations of the text took place during these years.) The *Epic of Gilgamesh* relates the relationship, first of antagonism and then of comradeship, of Gilgamesh and a wild creature, Enkidu. Their

adventures together end when Enkidu slays a monster and is killed in retaliation by the gods. Gilgamesh, now haunted by thoughts of death, goes on a quest to find immortality. *Gilgamesh* was a favourite of the Sumerians and was translated into other languages of the Near East, including Hittite and Hurrian. Some scholars have suggested that it may have been an influence on Homer's epics. (Parallels have been drawn between its opening sentence and that of the *Odyssey*, and with the way similar themes of mortality are dealt with in the *Iliad*.) Among the stories recorded is that of a great flood, and excavations at Ur itself do contain a layer of undisturbed clay some 2.5 metres thick that Leonard Woolley believed was that of the great flood of the Bible. It has been a difficult claim to sustain as the plains of southern Mesopotamia were so close to sea level that flooding was common and many cities were either lost or abandoned as the river courses shifted closer or further away from them. Yet one flood recorded at Shuruppak was survived by 'a wise man' who took to an ark when the god Enlil unleashed his wrath on the city. (For a well-received translation of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, see the Penguin Classics edition by Andrew George, London and New York, 2003.)

The 'Royal' burials at Ur suggest a society in which some women are given high status in their own right. Another famous text from this period tells the story of the priestess Enheduanna who had been appointed to an elite position in the religious life of Ur by Sargon. (She enjoys the honorary title 'daughter of Sargon'.) After a later revolt by Ur against Akkad, Enheduanna, not surprisingly, loses her position and is expelled from the city, whose local god Nanner is restored to prominence. Enheduanna retaliates by linking herself to the goddess Inanna, from the nearby city of Uruk, who is related to the Akkadian goddess Ishtar. She manages to return to Ur and persuade the populace that An, who has supremacy among the gods, has given judgement in favour of Inanna, who now supplants Nanner in the city. Some later texts even imply that Inanna enjoyed love-making with the king of Ur. The story suggests that women of exceptional ability such as Enheduanna were able to exert influence, especially through the manipulation of the gods in their favour. Yet women as a whole had no special status. Alongside the story of Enheduanna is a text describing the textile workers of Ur, who are listed as the humblest workers of all, and then, as in many parts of the world now, made up of women and children.

Control of the Dynasty's subjects was much more complete than under the Akkadian empire. The central government conscripted labour. Relationships with local governors were strengthened by marriages with the ruler—Shulgi is recorded as having nine wives, several from prominent local families. Provincial governors acted as judges and supervised the canal system. They were supported by local military leaders even though in foreign policy the aggressive tactics of the Akkadians appear to have been replaced with diplomacy.

By 2000 BC the power of the Third Dynasty was faltering. The fertility of the land was being undermined by an influx of salt brought down in the annual floods. The bureaucracy of the state had become so complex—it is known that sesame oil was classified in four grades, while a single sheep's existence is found recorded on three separate tablets—that there may have been a stifling of initiative. There is a sense of

internal disintegration that left the state vulnerable when external enemies appeared. The collapse was sudden. Ur was sacked by invading Elamites in 2004 and *The Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur* records the razing of the residential areas. The devastation was contrasted with an ideal state in which the rivers watered the lands and farmers went about their business in joy with all protected by the care of the gods. Other conflicts followed as another powerful city, Isin, struggled to hold Nippur, the most prestigious religious centre of Sumer, against outside attack.

The Old Babylonian Period (2000–1600 BC)

The most important conqueror of the following period was Hammurabi, a king of the city of Babylon. As the deeper layers of the site of Babylon became waterlogged and irrecoverable there is virtually nothing remaining from this period and Hammurabi's rise to power is obscure. He seems to have begun his career cautiously in the 1790s, strengthening his own kingdom through canals and fortified cities and working in alliance with other kings. Then, in the 1760s, he broke free and defeated the major cities of the southern plain, Isin, Nippur, Ur, and Uruk, thus making himself overlord of the region. He now expanded east to the Tigris, gaining control of the trade routes through to the Iranian plateau, and then in 1761 captured the major trading city of Mari, further north on the Euphrates, whose walls he demolished. Following the sack of Mari, Hammurabi moved westwards, until he came up against the border of the major state of Yamhad.

Hammurabi is best remembered for his 'law code'. It has been found beautifully inscribed in a stone stele at Susa, apparently looted and taken there by Elamite kings in the thirteenth century where French excavators found it. (It was believed originally to have been in the temple of the sun god Shamesh in Sippar, an important trading city on the Euphrates north-west of Babylon, and its removal shows the symbolic power of such steles.) It is written in literary Akkadian. As with many such texts, its purpose is now seen as royal propaganda rather than a system of laws *per se*. There are no references in other Babylonian law cases to the code, for instance. Rather, the laws on the stele represent actual cases where the king believes he has acted wisely. Hammurabi wishes to proclaim himself as a benign ruler who has secured justice for his peoples. ('I am indeed the shepherd who brings peace, whose sceptre is just,' as he states). In particular he shows himself untangling a mass of tricky problems associated with marriage and inheritance.

Other than his law code the most important legacy of Hammurabi's reign is the massive palace archives from the defeated city of Mari. Most of the 25,000 tablets are now published. They provide a vivid picture of the precarious survival of numerous small trading states who find themselves in competition with each other. They have to be open to the outside world to exploit the possibilities for trade, yet this same dependence on open trade routes makes them acutely vulnerable. The Mari archives are full of accounts of raids on the city's territories by outlaws and nomadic tribes. Borders were difficult to hold and there was continual interaction

between the palace and the herding peoples of its outlying regions who could be given land or manufactured goods in return for their loyalty and availability for military service. Relationships between neighbouring states were maintained through a series of shifting alliances in which dynastic marriages or the exchange of goods (tin was a favourite for Mari) were used to maintain security. At the same time the economy had to be fostered. The palace itself encouraged trade, oversaw the irrigation of crops, and managed the production of textiles (in which even the queen took part). Alongside royal activity other landowners and traders helped to sustain the prosperity of the state. The archives are important also for their documentation of religious life with details of local prophets (on the model of Israel) and the skilled art of liver divination, even the rituals of the river ordeal by which guilt or innocence was 'proved' when no witnesses to an alleged crime were available. The accused, or a substitute chosen by him, could prove innocence by swimming for a defined length in the river. There are numerous other states mentioned in the texts, and the names of some 500 cities, for some of which there is no other documentary or archaeological evidence. For instance, the state of Yamhad is given great prominence, yet its capital Halab, now under the modern city of Aleppo, has never been excavated, a reminder that the study of the history of the Ancient Near East remains in its infancy.

Despite the break-up of Hammurabi's empire Babylon survived as an important city and was to have revivals of power and prosperity for many centuries to come. It appears from surviving records of private contracts, loans, and property sales that Babylonian society allowed more freedom of enterprise than that of Sumer. Trade was conducted by individuals rather than the state and landowners were free to exploit their land. A major source of information for this period is the archive from Sippar. Here a group of women, known as the *naditu*, drawn from some of the city's wealthier families, lived in a segregated area of the city, the *gagum*, as a sort of religious order. They were described as betrothed to the god Shamash but their sexually ambiguous position allowed them to openly engage in commerce. They traded in land and cattle and even, through intermediaries, commodities such as tin. Whatever their relationship with the god, it did not require asceticism. Juniper oil, myrtle oil, and other perfumes were sought in exchange for silver.

These centuries were a time of prosperity and also a period of rich cultural and intellectual development in Mesopotamia. In literature the story of Atrahasis, 'outstanding in wisdom', outlines the doings of the gods in a way, which finds parallels in Homer's *Iliad*. In both works the gods are described as drawing lots to parcel out the heaven, earth, and the sea between them. The Babylonian epic of creation, the *Enuma Elish* (scholars differ as to whether it was composed in the fifteenth or twelfth century), talks of the oceans as being the first creations before heaven and earth—an idea that was possibly taken up by the Greek philosopher Thales of Miletus as the basis for his own cosmogony (see p. 192).

The Babylonians excelled in astronomy and mathematics. They developed a calendar, based on the moon with regular additions of months to keep it in line with

the solar year. Their calculations became so exact that eventually the Babylonian astronomer Kidinnu (c.380 BC) calculated the length of a lunar month to within one second of its true length. The Babylonian calendar later passed to the Jews (at the time of the Babylonian captivity: see below). On tablets from the period 1800–1600 BC there is evidence of multiplication, division, the calculation of squares and cubes, and even some logarithms. The Babylonians were able to calculate the value of the square root of 2 to within 0.000007 and it now seems certain that they knew of Pythagoras' theorem a thousand years before the followers of Pythagoras discovered it (although there is no evidence that they would have been able to prove it deductively as the Greeks were able to do). Mathematics was linked to the practical needs of engineering and surveying, and instructions survive for calculating the areas and volumes of different figures. The most striking innovation was positional notation, two numbers following each other (as in 12, the 1 standing for the base of ten, the 2 for the extra units). The Babylonians used 60 as their base. Seventy, for instance, is one base unit of 60 plus 10 extra units. The use of 60, a number useful because it can be divided by so many others, still survives to measure time—seconds in a minute, minutes in an hour—and angles. It arrived in the west through Hindu-Arabic intermediaries. Another innovation of the Babylonians, the musical scale, seems to have appeared about 1800 BC and passed via the Phoenicians to the Greeks in the first millennium BC.

The Invention of the Alphabet

Far to the west of Babylon lay the land of Canaan, the ancient name given to Palestine (the earliest recorded use of the name to refer to this region is to be found in Herodotus' *Histories*, fifth century BC). Here another important contribution to the western world was being made, the invention of the alphabet. Cuneiform and, to a much lesser extent, hieroglyphs were used in Syria and Palestine as early as the third millennium BC but they were unwieldy and took many years of training to master. By the beginning of the second millennium new independent city-states appeared in the region and they began to experiment with their own simpler ways of writing. One script originated in the important coastal town of Byblos. Only about a dozen examples survive, but these are enough to show that it was syllabic and consisted of about a hundred signs. Some of these were possibly borrowed directly from Egyptian hieroglyphs (see pp. 41, 58 below). The solution to an alphabet did, in fact, lie with hieroglyphs. The Egyptians had already evolved some signs that were exclusively consonantal (for instance, when they wanted to create a 'd' sign, they drew the hieroglyphic sign for a hand, *ad* in Egyptian). The step the Egyptians failed to take was to extract all the consonantal signs and create an alphabet from them. This was done by a Canaanite about 1500 BC. This innovator took an Egyptian hieroglyph and used it to express a consonant in his own Semitic language. The Semitic word for 'water' is *maym*. The scholar took only its first consonant *m* and found the Egyptian hieroglyph for 'water', which happens to be a wavy line. He then

assigned this sign to the sound *m*. Similarly with 'house', in Semitic *bet*. To get a sign for *b*, the scholar took the Egyptian hieroglyph for 'house', a bilateral, and assigned it the sound *b*. Once the concept was grasped that consonantal sounds could be written down and that any word could be written using a selection from just over twenty consonants, any culture could evolve its own signs to represent each consonantal sound. In the Syrian town of Ugarit on the Mediterranean coast, for instance, writing had been traditionally expressed in Babylonian cuneiform. Once the concept of the alphabet was grasped in Ugarit, it was written with cuneiform signs. By the thirteenth century BC the writers of Ugarit were using only twenty-two consonants. At some point (scholars have put forward dates as early as 1300 BC and as late as 1000 BC), the Phoenician cities developed their own alphabet, and probably transmitted it to the Greeks in the ninth or eighth century BC. Perhaps because they wished to use the alphabet primarily for the recording of poetry, the Greeks introduced vowels. (See further below p. 132.)

The Assyrians and the Hittites

The northern boundary of Babylonia was normally Gebel Hamrin, the Red Mountain. Beyond this mountain ridge another state, Assyria, emerged at the beginning of the second millennium BC. Ashur was set on a limestone cliff and given natural protection by the Tigris flowing round it. There was fertile land nearby and easy access to a trade route through the Zagros mountains into Iran. The early prosperity of Ashur rested on its success as a trading centre whose tentacles reached into Anatolia for silver, into Babylonia for textiles, and perhaps as far east as Afghanistan for its tin. The early Assyrian kings appear to have made Ashur a centre that the merchants of the cities of southern Mesopotamia could visit to buy supplies of precious metals. They paid in fine textiles that were then taken north to Anatolia by donkey caravan to exchange for more metals. Although the Assyrian kings of this period were important ceremonial figures (described in formal texts as vice-regents of the god Ashur) day-to-day administration of Ashur was apparently in the hands of a committee of the heads of the merchant families. Anything to do with prosperity of the city, from taxation to relations with neighbouring states, was under their control. The Assyrian merchants had their own quarters in the cities of northern Syria and Anatolia and their rights here were negotiated by the Ashur committee with the local Anatolian princes. The records, in cuneiform, of one of these communities, found at Kanesh in central Anatolia and dated to between 1900 and 1830 BC, illustrate the sophistication of the traders and include calculations of their prices, profits, and turnover, and even arrangements for credit. A common practice was for the merchant to be based in Anatolia while his wife stayed in Ashur supervising the collection and production of cloth. It was accepted that while abroad the merchant could acquire a local wife so long as both his wives were supported, and back in Ashur many of the wives seem to have retained the profit from their own activities.

In the early eighteenth century BC this network of Anatolian trade was disrupted by power struggles between rival Anatolian princes. An important moment seems to have been the overthrow of Kanesh by another principality, Kussara. The dynasty of Kussara then appears, about 1830, to have taken over the ruined city of Hattusas and transferred their archives here. This was the genesis of what became the empire of the Hittites, or the 'people of the Land of Hatti' as they called themselves. The word Hittite is that used in the Bible, but only of a period when the Hittites had been reduced to a tribal people after the collapse of their civilization in 1200. It was only in the late nineteenth century that it was realized that the predecessors of the biblical Hittites had controlled a great empire in the second half of the second millennium. Much about the Hittites remains obscure and the history of the empire is continually being rethought, especially as much new material is being discovered in excavations at Hattusas. (The expert on the Hittites is Trevor Bryce who has written a number of accessible introductions such as *The Kingdom of the Hittites*, new edition, Oxford, 2005, and *Life and Society in the Hittite World*, Oxford, 2004.)

One classification of the Hittite empire defines two phases, the first 1600–1400 BC, the Old Kingdom, the second from 1400 to 1200 BC, the New Kingdom, when the Hittites became a major player in the Ancient Near East, but this risks ignoring the continuities between two phases and the survival of the kingship throughout both. The Hittite capital remained Hattusas (the modern Boghazkoy) in north central Anatolia throughout the period. It was a rocky and easily defended site with one of the few good sources of water in what is an arid region. The records of the Old Kingdom show intense rivalries between branches of the royal family interspersed with, and often linked to, periods of military triumph or disaster. The tenacity of the Hittite kings was one of the most remarkable features of their rule. They seldom had enough manpower to launch major campaigns while their vassal states were often restless and they were jostled continuously by rival states on their borders. Their survival depended on the adept use of diplomacy and compromise rather than aggression.

The Hittites emerged at the same time as a number of stable and powerful states in the Ancient Near East. A dynasty of the kings of the little-known Kassites held Babylonia between 1595 and 1155. In the fifteenth century the Hurrians united in the state of Mitanni in northern Syria. In western Asia Mitanni was equalled in strength only by New Kingdom Egypt although its capital has not yet been found. Mitanni was the first casualty of a successful expansion of Hittite power that begins in the reign of Tudhaliya I at the end of the fifteenth century. Tudhaliya controlled the rich copper deposits of Isuwa that had traditionally been subject to Mitanni, and the Hittites soon appear as players on the wider diplomatic scene. There was more to be done to consolidate the state. It was only under the rule of Suppiluliuma I (c.1380–1345) that the Hittites fully overcame Mitanni and installed a puppet ruler there, using the state as a buffer between themselves and Assyria, which by now had revived and become the most powerful nation of northern Iraq. They also subdued large tracts of Anatolia and it is possible that one of the peoples they came into contact with, the Ahbijawa, were the Mycenaean Greeks (see Chapter 8). As the Hittites

expanded southwards into Syria towards the Euphrates they met the Egyptians. The two states clashed at the major Battle of Qadesh (1275 BC, see p. 74). The outcome was the consolidation of a border between Egypt and the Hittites in southern Syria.

This was typical of Hittite strategy. Once territory had been won, the empire was sustained by a series of treaties between the king, whose semi-divine status was emphasized by a great ceremonial complex constructed in Hattusas (which had been strongly fortified by Suppiluliuma I), and his defeated rivals. The territory of each was strictly defined and the supremacy of the 'Great King' was underlined by recounting how fortunate the subject king was to enjoy his mercy. Each had to come in person to Hattusas once a year with his tribute, supply troops when needed, and report any disturbances in his region. The Great King cemented his own relationships with his people through frequent travel in central Anatolia where he would preside at major festivals to emphasize his own close relationship with the gods. While alive he was their representative, on death he became a god himself.

The Hittites were also remarkably open to neighbouring cultures. In the royal archives of their capital Hattusas there are texts in eight different languages. This was a truly multilingual empire (although an Indo-European language known as Nesite, usually referred to as Hittite, was the language of imperial administration) and it was also multicultural in that it seems to have borrowed freely from the other cultures around it and it may have in its turn transmitted its borrowings to the eastern Mediterranean. The Hittites adopted cuneiform writing for their language, and their concept of law may have been influenced by law codes from Babylon and elsewhere. Some of their religious beliefs—the worship of a powerful sun goddess, for instance—also show Mesopotamian influence. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* has been found at Hattusas in Akkadian, Hurrian, and Hittite versions. The Hurrians were a particularly strong influence. The most important Hittite epic, that of Kumarbi, is borrowed directly from the Hurrians. (Kumarbi was a Hurrian god.) The epic is remarkable for describing sets of gods following on from each other in generations: Anu (heaven) is overthrown by his son Kumarbi, the father of the gods, who becomes a king and is overthrown in his turn by Teshub, a weather god. A similar story of conflict between gods is found in the *Theogony* of the eighth-century Greek writer Hesiod (see p. 139). In both cases a father god is castrated by his son, and it is assumed that the Kumarbi epic is yet another of the Near Eastern myths which filtered westwards into Greece.

Despite the varying fortunes of these states, they had much in common. All were centred on opulent palace capitals that controlled, or attempted to control surrounding territory. In this the Egyptian capitals of El-Amarna and Per-Ramesse (see Chapter 4) were typical and the same model might be seen in the Mediterranean in the palace-citadels of Mycenae and Tiryns. Even a small state such as Ugarit had an impressive palace complex and like the other cities of the period an extensive archive. Another common feature of these city-states was the adoption of chariots. Chariots were expensive and horses were not always easy to find so they become the military weapon of the elite, later the chosen means of the Homeric heroes entering battle. Yet it was precisely this common culture that seems to have

led to restraint, the drawing of boundaries after the Battle of Qadesh, for instance (see below, p. 74). There is extensive evidence of gift exchange between rival kings and commerce over far-flung trading networks.

Just how extensive these were at the time of Hittite power can be seen from one of the most exciting underwater finds of the past, a shipwreck from this period from Uluburun, near Kas in southern Turkey, which dates from the late fourteenth century BC. (Dendrochronology and radiocarbon datings reinforce each other to suggest a sinking in c.1304 BC.) The wreck is of a cargo ship which may have started its journey in the Levant and engaged in a circular voyage which took it northwards up the coast of the Levant, across to Cyprus, along the southern Anatolian coast, possibly on to Mycenaean Greece before taking advantage of the prevailing winds to head south to Crete, across to Egypt, and then back to the Levant. This time disaster struck on the Anatolian coast. The ship carried an extraordinary variety of goods. The cargo included ivory, glass (first invented about 1600 BC but still a precious commodity), cylinder seals, and pottery that came from throughout the Near East. Alongside these were copper ingots from Cyprus, ebony from south of Egypt, and bronze tools of Egyptian, Levantine, and even Mycenaean Greek design. The quantity of copper was matched by that of tin in the combination needed to form bronze. This is trade conducted at a sophisticated level with commercial acumen and mature systems of credit. (There is a good survey of the shipwreck in Colin Renfrew and Paul Bahn, *Archaeology*, 6th edition, London, 2012, pp. 370–1.)

Yet a hundred years later this complex network of trade and traders was disrupted. The end of the thirteenth century BC saw a cataclysmic collapse of the societies of the eastern Mediterranean. The fortified cities of Mycenaean Greece were destroyed as were settlements on Cyprus. About 1200 Hattusas itself was burned. Although Hittite principalities remained in Syria, the capital was abandoned and parts of the Anatolian plain deserted. So Hittite civilization disintegrated. The Egyptians appear to have been forewarned of the unrest and successfully fought off a collection of invaders, Libyans, ‘northerners coming from all lands’, and the mysterious ‘Sea Peoples’ who attacked the Delta. In the dislocation that followed Egypt withdrew to its heartland in the Nile valley. The economic networks of the eastern Mediterranean and Near East were broken up so comprehensively that a so-called ‘Dark Age’ set in.

The Egyptian texts that describe the invasions imply that the ‘Sea Peoples’ were some kind of invading force. More careful analysis of the evidence suggests that these wandering bands may have been the result of the breakdown of order rather than its instigators. Others may have been mercenaries fighting for Egypt’s neighbours, the Libyans and others. Scholars are now exploring the possibility that the intricate trading relationships between the peoples of the region had become over-extended, that taxation had alienated rural peoples on whose produce the civilizations ultimately depended and that this was a collapse of a whole system of interlocking cultures. Whatever the cause, the world that emerged from the ‘Dark Age’ that followed would be very different. (See Chapters 6 and 9 especially.)

3

Pyramids and Power

The Creation of an Egyptian State, 3500–1500 BC

When the Roman emperor Titus (ruled AD 79–81) was portrayed on a temple wall in Egypt, one of the provinces of his empire, he was shown standing with a mace raised menacingly in his right hand. An earlier ruler of Egypt, king Narmer, had been portrayed in the same pose some 3,000 years earlier. The worship of the Egyptian goddess Isis can be traced back to 2400 BC, 2,000 years before the rise of Rome. The cult still had enough vitality for worship of the goddess to spread throughout the Roman empire (there was a temple to Isis as far west as London), with her temple at Philae on the upper Nile closed by the emperor Justinian as late as AD 536, sixty years after the Roman empire had ‘fallen’ in the west. Egyptian religion, in short, entered its most expansionist phase when it was already far older than Christianity is now. Many of the distinctive features of Egyptian civilization were in place a thousand years before the pyramids were built. These are striking reminders of the longevity and continuity of early Egyptian history. This does not mean that Egyptian society was always stable—behind the ordered façade there were often moments of panic or disarray—rather there were consistent forces that gave enduring vigour and prosperity to Egyptian life.

The most persistent of these forces was the unique set of circumstances arising from the ecology of the Nile valley. While rainfall across the region had once been abundant, by 3000 BC the valley had virtually none. The water for its irrigation came down the Nile in annual floods, most of which originated in summer rains in the Ethiopian mountains. With the floods came silt, and the combination of fertile soil and ready water could produce yields of crops three or four times those from normal rain-fed soil. As important as the wealth of water and soil was the regularity with which the floods came. The Nile started to rise in May, and from July to October was high enough to flow out over the flood plain of the valley. This was *akhet*, the time of inundation. Four months later, by the beginning of November, the waters had begun to fall. The refertilized land could be marked out and ploughed and sowed. This was *peret*, the time ‘when the land reappeared’. The final four months of the year, *shemu*, from March to June, brought the harvest. The peasants of Egypt would wait to see the height and extent of each flood with some anxiety—it might be insufficient or overflow and flood their villages—but when they were lucky the fields along the Nile produced a large surplus of grain, probably three times as much as was needed for a healthy diet. Effectively gathered up this surplus

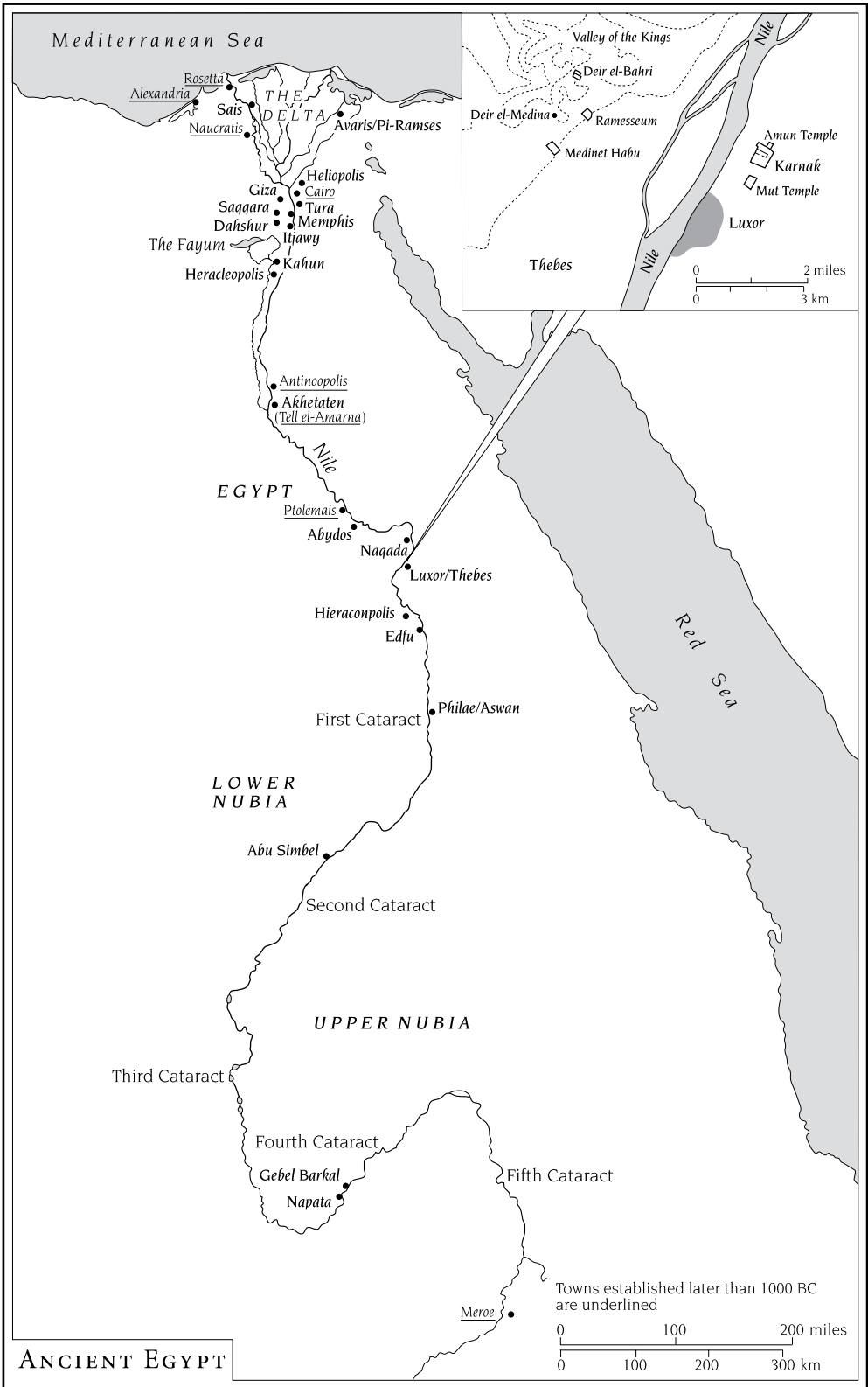
could be used to sustain rulers, palaces, craftsmanship, and great building projects and these are the achievements of the early kingdoms of Egypt, maintained, despite periods of breakdown, over twenty centuries.

To visit Egypt today remains an extraordinary experience. The pyramids are, of course, well known from illustrations and film but their size and even more so an entry to one of the inner chambers still provides as much resonance as it has done for visitors over forty centuries. Travelling up the Nile gives the feel that the land along the banks is still being worked as it has always been although now the dam at Aswan has brought the annual floods to an end. The great temples of the south, at Luxor, Edfu, and Abu Simbel, and the tombs of the Valley of the Kings or of queen Hatshepsut, have their own awe-inspiring quality. The impact is even greater if also experienced through the eyes of the nineteenth-century explorers. Amelia Edwards's *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* (published in London in 1877) is particularly evocative.

Beginnings

One of the most persistent Egyptian creation myths relates how at the beginning of all things was the sun, Ra. Ra scattered his semen and out of it sprang Shu, the god of dryness, and Tefnut, the goddess of humidity. Shu and Tefnut produced a new generation of gods, the sky goddess Nut and the earth god Geb. They in their turn gave birth to four children, Isis and Osiris, Seth and Nephthys. Isis and Osiris, husband and wife, became the first rulers of Egypt. However, Seth overthrew his brother, cutting him into pieces. Isis devotedly put him together again, adding a new penis (the original having been eaten by fish) with such success that she was able to conceive a son, Horus. She kept Horus hidden in the marshes until he was strong enough to overthrow Seth. Osiris meanwhile had become god of the underworld, where he acted as a symbol of rebirth. Seth continued in Egyptian mythology as a potential threat to order, while Horus remained as the protector of the earthly kings who were his successors. (See Richard Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, London and New York, 2003, for the details of the gods.)

This creation myth brought together several elements of early Egyptian history and beliefs. The 'family' was a composite one, made up of early gods from different cult centres along the Nile, while the conflict between Horus and Seth may well have echoed memories of a real struggle between two early states. It is a reminder that Egypt was not a natural unity. The country had two distinct ecologies. The valley was thin, often only a few kilometres wide in some areas, and stretching for 1,000 kilometres from the Nile Delta to the first cataract at Aswan. In the north, on the Delta, the river spread out over marshland and swamps that were rich in bird and animal life. There is no evidence that the Delta region actually ever formed an independent state, but there is increasing evidence of earlier cultures there to be found under depths of silt. The insistence that Egypt was made up of two distinct kingdoms, one in the north on the Delta, the other south along the valley, lasted in



MAP 2

Egyptian tradition long after the first unification in about 3000 BC. They are represented as the lands of reeds, the valley, and the lands of papyrus, the Delta, with different crowns and protecting gods.

Perhaps the most important development in recent Egyptian archaeology is the gradual piecing together of a sequence to Egyptian history that extends it far back beyond the first unification. Before 5000 BC there was still rainfall in what is now desert and it was possible for semi-nomadic cattle herders to roam the expanses, seeking refuge at oases during the summer months. Just as Eridu seems to have become sacred as a result of its water source so there are sites such as Nabta Playa, a hundred kilometres to the west of Abu Simbel on an ancient trade route west. (A *playa* is a depression that fills with water.) This became a ceremonial centre, possibly as early as the fifth millennium BC, with Egypt's first stone monuments, standing stones that may have been aligned with the stars, and a tradition of cattle sacrifice, the cattle being buried in 'tombs'. One theory suggests that cattle were sacrificed each year as their owners gathered in thanksgiving at the water. As the desert dried the nomads were driven into the Nile valley and it may have been this major transition that encouraged intense competition between rival groups and the emergence of hierarchical societies that were able to hold their own against each other.

The Unification of Egypt

Archaeological evidence shows that these early settlements had already developed distinctive features of later Egyptian civilization before 4000 BC. By that date burials in Upper Egypt were already being made with the body on its side facing west, the home of the setting sun, with provisions, food offerings, and hunting equipment being left for the afterlife. Emmer wheat, barley, and flax, the staples of Egyptian farmers, were being cultivated. During the second half of the fourth millennium, the four to five hundred years before the first recorded unification of Egypt, the scattered agricultural communities of the valley grew larger. The expansion of settlements such as Naqada and Hieraconpolis may reflect their position on the trading routes to the gold mines of the eastern desert but this was also a region of agricultural diversity. Hieraconpolis, a site that has now been excavated over a hundred years, grew dramatically between 3800 and 3400 and may have been home to five to ten thousand inhabitants. At Naqada north of Hieraconpolis there was a walled town as early as 3600 BC and a major cemetery with 3,000 tombs. Naqada has given its name to the culture that persisted between 3800 and 3000 BC, one that spread throughout Upper Egypt. The rise of these cities coincides with more sophisticated craftsmanship. Graves are becoming richer, with goods now made in gold, copper, and a variety of stones. Pottery from Hieraconpolis is beautifully made and its standard style suggests a select group of elite craftsmen working to common models. Among the luxury items are decorated maceheads, always a symbol of power in Egypt and often found buried in the more opulent tombs in the cemetery at Hieraconpolis.

The need for finer raw materials acted as the catalyst to open Egypt to a wider world. The Nile valley provided clay for pottery and mudbricks but little wood. Flint was the only immediately accessible stone (and was fashioned into fine ceremonial knives). Anything else, the fine white limestone from the rocks which lined the valley, the hard stones, granite and diorite, gold, copper, or semi-precious stones, had to be quarried or mined from the surrounding desert or traded from further afield. This required an ordered society able to organize expeditions across the inhospitable desert. By the end of the fourth millennium contact had been made as far as Mesopotamia. Cylinder seals have been found in Egypt that echo those of Sumer, and designs from them or from actual buildings may have inspired the form of the façades of Egyptian mudbrick tombs. Palaces adopt from Mesopotamia the same pattern of alternating recesses and buttresses for their façades that were used for temples there. The concept of writing, first found in Egypt on a set of inscribed labels in a royal tomb in Abydos dating from about 3100 BC, may have evolved parallel with but possibly earlier than in Sumer. Both Sumerian cuneiform (see above, p. 24) and Egyptian hieroglyphs (see below) used the same convention of combining signs to represent the sound of a word with others to represent its meaning.

Hieroglyphs, 'sacred carved letters', were derived from pictures found on much earlier Egyptian pottery. At first writing appears to have been confined to the court, used to record the state's economic activities, the name of the king (in a format known as the *serekh*), and in formal commemorative art such as the Narmer Palette (below). However, the emergence of writing marks a crucial moment as it offered a further means of royal control that could be sustained through fostering a formal class of scribes.

As the early Egyptian settlements on the Nile grew, so did tensions between them. They were probably exacerbated by a period of increasing aridity after 3300 BC which intensified settlement in the Nile valley and led to competition between rulers over luxury resources, copper, gold, and hard stone. It is reflected in the art of the period. A painted tomb at Hierakonpolis (Tomb 100) shows a man struggling with two lions and a ruler figure holding a mace over three captives while other palettes (the so-called Hunters' and Battlefield palettes) show contrasting scenes of conflict and harmony among animals. (The palettes were flat stones used originally as grinding surfaces for cosmetics but they later acquired ritual significance.) Rulers were often personified as animals, bulls, or lions in this period, as if they had to differentiate themselves for ordinary mortals through symbols of energy and power. The story of Horus and Seth may well represent an actual struggle between Hierakonpolis, a cult centre for Horus, and Naqada, whose cult god was Seth.

There was probably no one moment of unification but in later tradition it was from this disorder that a king named Narmer finally achieved some kind of dominance over Egypt just before 3000 BC. The archaeological evidence does not yet give unequivocal support for a conquest as some sites show undisturbed occupation. Some scholars see a lengthier process in which an earlier king, Scorpion, played a significant part in achieving an ordered state. At some point, perhaps soon after unification, Narmer's successors established their capital at Memphis, strategically

placed at the junction between the Delta and the valley. Their new conquest, the Delta, also had its important settlements although none is yet known to have reached the size of those of Upper Egypt. At Tell el-Farkha in the north-eastern Delta, a wonderful collection of bone figures shows that here too a sophisticated culture had developed. Frustratingly, one of the most important settlements of Lower Egypt, Maadi, has been almost totally obliterated by the spread of modern Cairo. Earlier excavations showed that its culture was completely distinct from that further south and had especially strong links with the Near East.

The Narmer palette is a remarkable survival and now enjoys pride of place at the entrance to the Cairo Museum. It was found carefully preserved in a temple deposit at Hieraconpolis by English archaeologists in the winter of 1897–8. The king was unknown but the reconstruction of two hieroglyphs, a catfish (*nar*) and a chisel (*mer*), gave us the name for which there was then no other record. The palette portrays Narmer, on one side of the palette wearing the crown of Upper Egypt and on the other that of Lower Egypt. The king is apparently shown as a southerner conquering the north, the Delta, though his enemies may well have included neighbouring peoples such as the Libyans. The king is shown on one side subduing his enemies, some of whom lie decapitated before him, their heads between their feet. It is disputed as to whether this depicts an actual battle or simply represents a symbol of royal power. Quite apart from its historical importance, the palette shows that many conventions of Egyptian art are now in place. Status is represented by the comparative size of the figures. Narmer is the largest figure throughout. In one scene an official is shown as smaller than Narmer but still much larger than the accompanying standard-bearers. The artist is not concerned so much with providing a proper representation as with passing on detail, even if this means distorting normal perspectives. The face of the king, for instance, is shown in profile but his eye is shown in full and the shoulders are viewed from the front. Both hands and feet are shown in full.

Horus continued throughout Egyptian history as the special protector of the kings. He was always portrayed as a falcon. On a magnificent statue of Khafra (often known by the Greek version of his name, Chephren), one of the pyramid-building kings of the Old Kingdom, now in the Cairo Museum, he is shown perching on the king's back, his wings around the king's shoulders. Each king took a 'Horus name' in addition to his birth-name and other titles. It was this name that was stamped as a cipher on all goods entering or leaving the royal treasury. It was often a reflection of how he saw his political ambitions—'He who breathes life into the heart of the Two Lands' or 'Bringer of Harmony', for instance.

Kingship is now established as the enduring form of Egyptian government. From this moment Egyptian history is divided into dynasties of the ruling families. In the past, historians have adopted a list of thirty of these dynasties compiled by an Egyptian priest, Manetho, on the orders of king Ptolemy II about 280 BC. They stretch from Narmer to the overthrow of Persian rule by Alexander in 332 BC. (A Thirty-First 'Persian' Dynasty was added later to Manetho's text.) Manetho's list still defines the broad chronology of ancient Egypt and the sequence of rulers but it leaves much

unresolved. It makes Narmer's unification appear much more sudden than archaeological evidence suggests and obscures gaps in order to portray Egyptian history as an unbroken series of kings. At times of breakdown, when dynasties may have ruled alongside each other, Manetho puts them one after another, providing a source of much confusion to historians. Some of Manetho's dynasties, such as the Seventh, have remained obscure; others such as the Ninth and Tenth may represent only one ruling family, not two.

So as a background for dating, historians have used other methods, radio-carbon, stratigraphy (which has produced sequences of pottery styles which have been dated, for instance), astronomical records, and, of course, other written sources. They have received extra help from the Egyptians themselves. An Egyptian calendar was developed based on the rise of the 'Dog Star', Sirius. Sirius remains below the horizon in Egypt for some seventy days, reappearing at sunrise around 19 July. By chance this coincided with the beginning of the Nile floods and so for the Egyptians marked the beginning of a new year. This 'solar' calendar had a full cycle of 365 days and 6 hours, in other words, every four years an extra day would have to be added to the year to keep it synchronized with the sun. Another calendar was based on the night sky. It was possible to plot how the stars seen on the horizon as the night passed into day moved in relation to the horizon in a regular pattern. The stars were divided into thirty-six groups, each of which rose above the horizon for ten days before being supplanted by another group. This led to a year of 360 days, and five extra days, birthdays of the gods, were added to make up 365, but this, of course, did not include the extra six hours. It has been calculated that both calendars, solar and lunar, set off together about 2773 BC. However, as the years passed it must have become clear that the lunar calendar was falling behind the solar calendar at the rate of one day every four years. By this time the system was so embedded that the two calendars were never reconciled and it took 1,460 years (i.e. four times 365) for them to coincide again.

This discrepancy has proved the Egyptologists' asset. A Roman historian happened to record that in AD 139 there was a coincidence between the rising of Sirius and the start of a civil year. By going back in jumps of 1,460 years other coincidences have been calculated for 1322, 2782, and 4242 BC. On a few occasions written sources have recorded the discrepancy between the rising of Sirius and the civil year. One document from the reign of king Sesostris III, for instance, mentions that Sirius will rise on the sixteenth day of the eighth month of the seventh year of the king's reign (dated here on the lunar calendar), and from this the year, 1866 BC, can be calculated. Other reigns can be dated from this, and a partial chronology of Egyptian history reconstructed.

This still leaves discrepancies, periods, and reigns of individual pharaohs where the chronology is debatable. There are so-called 'high', 'middle', and 'low' chronologies. In order to avoid confusion the chronology used here is that of the *Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, 2nd edition, Oxford, 2003, as described in chapter 1 of the *History* by Ian Shaw, 'Chronologies and Cultural Change in Egypt'.

The First Dynasties

The appearance of writing, the unification of the country, and the establishment of a capital at Memphis mark the beginning of what is known as the Early Dynastic period, the First to Third Dynasties (c.3000–2613 BC). (See Emily Teeter (ed.), *Before the Pyramids: The Origins of Egyptian Civilization*, Chicago, 2011, for an excellent illustrated survey of this early period.) This is the world's first stable monarchy—in contrast to the battling city-states of Mesopotamia. In these 400 years a model of kingship was developed. By 2500 BC the myth had developed that the king was the direct heir of the sun god Ra. Ra, it was said, impregnated the ruling queen (appearing to her usually in the guise of her husband). Thoth, the herald of the gods, then appeared to her to tell her that she was to give birth to the son of Ra. The royal couple thus acted as surrogate parents for their successor, and 'son' succeeded 'father' without a break. The king's wife was traditionally referred to as 'the one who unites the two Lords'. The earlier tradition of Horus as protector was absorbed into the myth by making Horus a member of Ra's family, and the god continued as the special protector of the king against the forces of disorder personified by Seth. In essence the king had a dual nature, the divine emanating through his human form.

On the succession of a new king there was a coronation ceremony, the *kha*, the word also used for the appearance of the sun at dawn, when the king was given his divine name that was afterwards written together with his existing personal name alongside the symbols of Upper Egypt (a sedge plant) and Lower Egypt (a bee). After thirty years of a reign there was the jubilee ceremonial of *sed*, when the king received the renewed allegiance of the provinces of Egypt wearing first the White Crown of Upper Egypt and then the Red Crown of Lower Egypt. Each province brought their local gods for him to honour. Part of the ceremony involved the king running a circuit of boundary stones that symbolized the full extent of his territory as if to confirm his fitness to rule.

Ceremonial was important but not enough. Although the ideology of the divine king was imposed in Egyptian life from the earliest times, his survival rested on being able to keep order (any loss of control was traditionally rationalized as a sign that the gods had withdrawn their support), and this involved bureaucratic expertise. From early times taxes were collected in kind by the court and then stored in granaries before being rationed out to support building projects and the feeding of labourers. Reserves were kept for emergency feeding. The sophistication of the system can be shown by the annual records of the height of the Nile floods from which the expected crop yield for the year could be calculated in advance. The Palermo stone (so-called because it is now housed in a museum in Palermo, Sicily) of about 2400 BC records these details in an important list of annals of earlier dynasties, which in itself shows how hieroglyphs were being used to systematically record the past. The king may also have controlled foreign trade, as it was the court that was the main consumer of raw materials and centre of craftsmanship.

The administrative complex around the royal court at Memphis was known as *Per Ao*, The Great House, a name used eventually, from about 1400 BC for the king himself, pharaoh. Heading the administration was the vizier, whose roles included overseeing the maintenance of law and order and all building operations. Then there were a host of other officials, with titles such as 'elder of the gates', 'chief of the secrets of the decrees', and 'controller of the Two Thrones', whose functions have been lost. It can be assumed that there were strong links with provinces, whose boundaries may have been based on much earlier states, as without these order could not have been maintained or resources channelled upwards to the court. The appearance of monumental 'palace façade' tombs along the Nile is the clearest sign that the royal administration was making itself felt throughout the kingdom. The Palermo stone also records royal progresses along the Nile every two years that allowed direct supervision of affairs by the king.

Resources were not only needed to sustain the king and his officials in life. From the earliest dynasties it was believed that at the death of a king his divinely created spirit, the *ka*, would leave his body and then ascend to heaven, where it would accompany his father, the sun god, Ra, on the boat on which Ra travelled through each night before reappearing in the east. However, certain formalities had to take place if the king was to reach his destination safely. The body of the king had to be preserved, its name recorded on the tomb, and the *ka* had to be provided with all it needed for the afterlife. It could not survive without nourishment.

These requirements were the same for all Egyptians, but only the kings could normally travel to the other world. Others, at this period, had to be content with an existence within the tomb or possibly in a shadowy underworld underneath it. However, those officials who had enjoyed his special favour might be able to rise with the king, and the custom grew of placing their tombs next to those of the kings in the hope that they would go to heaven with him as his attendants in the afterlife. It was a shrewd way of encouraging loyalty from leading nobles and officials.

Originally the bodies of the kings had been buried in mudbrick chambers. These gradually became more elaborate, the body being buried deeper and deeper in the ground, probably to protect the fine goods that were now buried with it. The deeper the body was buried, however, the more likely it was to decay (a body left in sand near the surface normally dried out from the warmth of the sun), and so there developed the process of embalming to fulfil the requirement that the body should be preserved. The viscera from queen Hetepheres of the Fourth Dynasty, mother of Khufu (Greek Cheops), the great pyramid-builder, have survived from c.2580 BC but no full mummy now survives earlier than one from the Fifth Dynasty (c.2400 BC). By the New Kingdom the art of embalming was to have developed into a complex ritual providing the world with one of its most enduring images of Egyptian civilization.

The early kings were buried in the sacred city of Abydos, far up in Upper Egypt, a recognition of their origin as southerners. Typically the tombs had a central burial chamber, walled with timber and surrounded by store-rooms for goods and subsidiary graves for officials. Near each tomb was a walled funerary enclosure where

rituals relating to the cult worship of each king were carried out. Despite plundering over the centuries, enough material survives to show that the tombs were filled with pots (containing food and drink for the afterlife), well-crafted stone vessels, sometimes finished in gold, and objects in copper and ivory. Another burial ground developed at Saqqara near Memphis. It used to be believed that the graves of the early kings were actually here, with those at Abydos being merely cenotaphs. Now it seems that the tombs at Saqqara, finely constructed though they might be, are in fact those of leading officials. The need to provide luxury goods for the kings' and his courtiers' survival in their afterlife appears to have been the catalyst for a major explosion in the arts during the Early Dynastic period.

Once the shafts of the tomb had been dug out and the surrounding chamber completed, the whole was finished off with a rectangular building over the tomb at ground level. These constructions have been nicknamed 'mastabas', after the benches that are found outside modern Egyptian houses. The mastabas of early tombs, royal and otherwise, were often constructed in the form of a model palace. It was the convention to build in a false door through which it was believed the *ka* would be able to cross. Within the door a stone gravestone known as the stele was placed. On the stele were inscribed the names and titles of the deceased, often with a representation of him seated at a table enjoying his offerings. Sometimes a list of the offerings was included, the idea being that the mere act of reading the list by the deceased could cause them to materialize and sustain the *ka* even if there was nothing real to eat.

The Building of the Pyramids

There are signs about 2700 BC that unrest in Upper Egypt led to the faltering of the evolving kingdom. It may have been associated with the adoption of a new royal burial ground at Saqqara, far north of Abydos and close to the 'capital' of Memphis, which gave the real or imagined impression that the kings had relaxed their authority in the south. Not for the last time in Egyptian history, a forceful new ruler, Khasekhemwy, restored order and brought fresh energy into the kingdom. Khasekhemwy (died c.2686) is recorded as the last king of the Second Dynasty but his successors in the Third carried on the new impetus. Around 2650 BC an architectural revolution took place, a rare occurrence in Egyptian history. It involved the tomb of king Djoser, the second of the new dynasty, at Saqqara, now firmly established as the royal burial ground. One of Djoser's advisers, Imhotep, had been entrusted with the supervision of the building of the royal tomb, a task that was always begun well before death. Above ground the tomb started as an ordinary mastaba (in other words was a continuation of earlier models), but this was extended and built upon so that eventually a stepped 'pyramid' of six layers emerged. On the southern side were two courtyards, and it has been assumed that these were copies of courtyards from the king's own palace at Memphis. The largest has been seen as a royal appearance court, a carefully designed forum for showing off the king, perhaps first

at his coronation and then at other great festivities. The smaller court seems to have been a copy of that used for the *sed* festival, with mock chapels for the provincial gods and two thrones, one to represent each kingdom of Egypt. It is as if the king is provided not only with goods, set out in elaborate chambers under the pyramid, but with the setting which would allow him to continue as ruler in the afterlife.

Nothing like Djoser's funerary complex had been seen elsewhere. It was faced in the fine limestone from the quarries at Tura, and is the earliest stone monument of this size built anywhere in the world. (The earlier great temples of Mesopotamia were built in mudbrick.) The builders remained under the influence of earlier wooden models. The stone columns in the entrance colonnade are fluted, the first known examples of a design that persists into Greek architecture. The flutes represent either bound reeds or carved tree trunks, copying wooden originals. The complex introduces another innovation in the *serdab*, a room attached to the main building in which offerings were placed. It had a slit in the inside wall opening on to an inner room where a statue of Djoser was placed in such a way as to be able to see the offerings. The king, seated and looking forward, provided a model for similar statues throughout Egyptian history, though these might also be standing or kneeling. Whatever the stance, they must be shown able to view or receive offerings. Their monumentality also reflects the enormous difficulty in working hard stone in that arms and legs are not shown distinct from the body. For the first time, too, the reliefs in Djoser's tomb portray the king not as a conqueror, as is the earlier convention, but as undertaking the rituals of kingship. One shows him running, perhaps as part of the *sed* ceremony. A mass of tunnels surround the underground tomb of the king and they are filled with thousands of stone vessels, some of which show inscriptions from earlier kings as if Djoser was being enshrined as an heir to the past.

There is continued speculation among scholars as to why this revolutionary design was adopted. One simple view is that Imhotep wanted to make the building more imposing. In its finished state the stepped pyramid was 60 metres high. Another view is that the king was associated with a star cult and the steps were the means by which he was to ascend to heaven. Inscriptions from later pyramids, the so-called Pyramid Texts, support this suggestion. One reads, 'A staircase to heaven is laid for him (the king) so that he may mount up to heaven thereby.' Whatever the reason, the Step Pyramid continued to inspire reverence for centuries. It was a popular place of pilgrimage and was being restored 2,000 years after it was built. Imhotep himself was later deified as the son of Ptah, the god of craftsmen.

Djoser's dynasty, the Third, brings to an end the Early Dynastic period. With the Fourth Dynasty (c.2613 BC) begins the Old Kingdom proper, which was to last to about 2130 BC. The Old Kingdom is dominated by the building of the Pyramids, one of the great administrative feats of history. For the Great Pyramid of Khufu (Cheops) alone, 2,500,000 limestone blocks with an average weight of 2.5 tonnes, were hauled up into position. One of the mathematicians accompanying Napoleon on his expedition to Egypt in 1798 calculated that the stones of the three pyramids of Giza could enclose France within a wall 3 metres high. It goes without saying that the

Old Kingdom was a period of prosperity and stability, with power focused overwhelmingly on the king. (There is a fine introduction to all aspects of the pyramids by Mark Lehner, *The Complete Pyramids: Solving the Ancient Mysteries*, London and New York, 2008.)

The transition from step pyramid to pyramid for the royal tomb can be seen at Meidum, some 50 kilometres south of Memphis, where there are the remains of what was built as a seven-stepped pyramid on the model of Djoser's. It was then enlarged to eight steps and finally the whole was encased in Tura limestone to form a true pyramid. For the first time a causeway was provided leading to a valley temple. (The king's body would have been brought up the causeway for final burial after rituals in the valley temple.) The pyramid is attributed to king Sneferu, first of the Fourth Dynasty, but it may not be his as he built two pyramids of his own at Dahshur nearby as well as another at Meidum. (In terms of volume Sneferu was the greatest pyramid builder of them all and he funded his programme by creating royal estates in Upper Egypt and cattle farms across the Delta that provided grain and meat for his workers. Analysis of remains in the workers' villages show that they were fed a diet rich in protein.) Sneferu's were the first pyramids planned as such from the start. However, there was still much to be learnt. The desert surface on which the first of Sneferu's pyramids was based was unsuitable, and, in order to prevent the collapse of the structure, its weight was reduced by decreasing the angle of the incline of the upper blocks, earning it the name 'the bent pyramid'.

The transition from a stepped to a true pyramid was a difficult one for the builders to make. They could no longer rely on each step providing a base for the next layer. It is unclear why the transition took place, but it may have been the result of changing religious beliefs. It has been argued, for instance, that Sneferu adhered to a sun cult. He was certainly a formidable man and titles that he adopted show that he identified his authority with that of the gods. One major change in the complex surrounding the true pyramids was that the mortuary chapel was now moved to the eastern side (from the traditional northern side) so that it received the first rays of the sun. The whole shape of the pyramid can be seen as the rays of the sun coming downwards. (There is an echo of this at Heliopolis, centre of a cult of the sun god, where a stone construction roughly in the shape of a pyramid, the so-called *benben*, was used as a symbol of the sun.) Sneferu's title is enclosed within a cartouche, an oblong circle that appears to signify his power over all that the sun encircled. The symbol became permanent: a cartouche remains the easiest way of spotting a king's title among other hieroglyphics.

It was Sneferu's son Khufu (Cheops) who emulated his father's building and began the first of the three great pyramids at Giza. The fact that he chose a new site suggests he was determined to make his own impact, and the tradition that he was a tyrannical megalomaniac lasted for centuries. (The Greek historian Herodotus passed on the story that he even sent his daughter into a brothel to raise more money for his projects. She hit on the idea of charging each of her customers a stone and was so successful in her trade, the story went, that she was able to use the total to build a small pyramid of her own!)

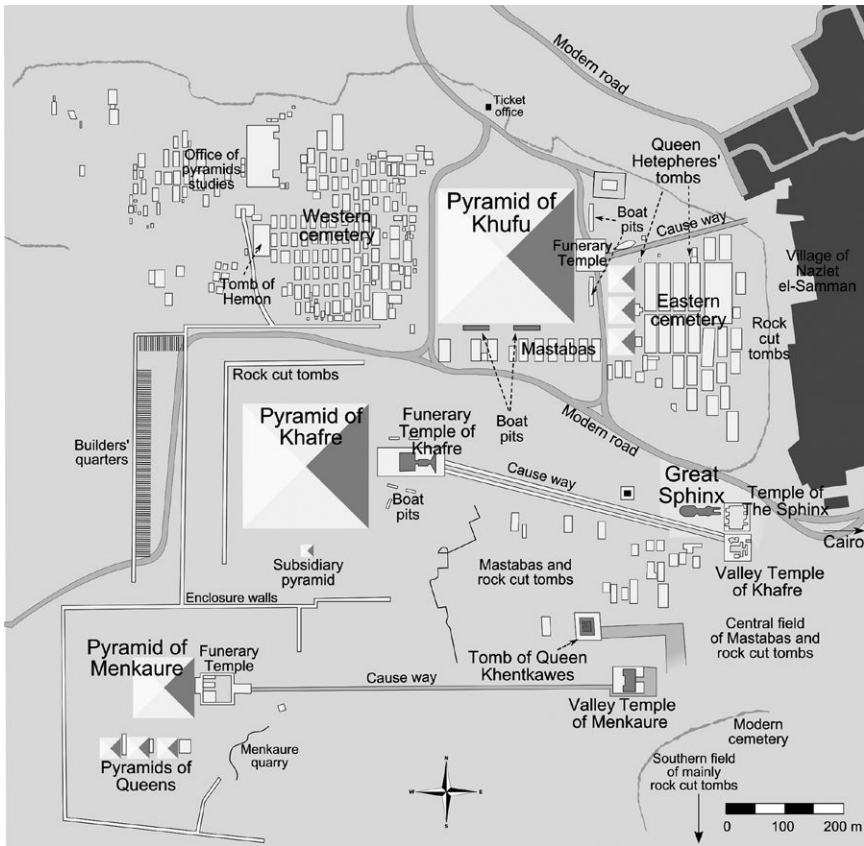


Fig. 1 Plan of Giza Plateau. The plateau provided an excellent solid base for the weight of the pyramids and the stone could be brought in during the floods. Note the Valley Temples where funerary rituals were carried out before the final burial in the Pyramid. The mastaba tombs of the royal family and favoured officials were clustered close to the pyramids.

The Giza plateau held three major pyramids, the Great Pyramid of Khufu, a slightly smaller one to his son, Khafra (Chephren in Greek), and the third, about half the size of the larger two, to Menkaure (Mycerinus in Greek), whose reign was short. The burial chambers of each pyramid have been located but they were robbed in antiquity. (Khufu's burial chamber was unusual in being in the middle of the pyramid rather than below ground.) The building of the pyramids needed great technical skills but relatively little technology. The site was important. The rock had to be firm enough to sustain the massive weight of the building yet close enough to water for the stone to be brought in during the time of inundation. (Fifty-tonne blocks of granite, used to line the burial chambers and the lower courses of some pyramids, would have had to be brought from Aswan, hundreds of kilometres distant. Limestone, the main casing stone, was much more readily accessible.)

The Great Pyramid of Khufu was built on ground that was carefully levelled round the planned edges of the pyramid with a mound of higher rock left in the middle. Each side measured almost exactly 230 metres and the whole was aligned perfectly to the north. This appears to have been done by taking the mid-point between the rising and setting position of a northern star. Within the pyramid shafts ran from the centre in the direction of important stars such as Sirius, the dog star. The accuracy and forward planning required is uncanny.

The most probable building method was by the use of ramps (pulleys were not known until Roman times). A mass of chips and mortar has been found that appear to have come from such ramps. A suggested gradient along which even a massive stone (and some pyramid stones weighed as much as 200 tonnes) could be shifted was about one in twelve. A ramp with this gradient could be built perpendicular to the pyramid base and as each level rose it would be heightened and lengthened to maintain the gradient. The stones themselves seem to have been loaded on to sledges that were then attached to ropes and pulled over timbers by gangs of men. Recent experiments at Giza with stone blocks suggest a workforce of some 25,000 would have been able to complete the Great Pyramid in twenty years.

The pyramids were only part of the funerary complex. At its fullest extent, best seen in the remains around Khafra's pyramid, it included a mortuary temple along the eastern side of the pyramid, where the body of the king was received for the final ceremonies before burial and where later offerings could be left. Leading up to the temple was a covered causeway nearly 600 metres long, its walls carved with reliefs. It led from the valley temple, where the king's remains were first received and probably given ritual purification before entering the final journey to the burial place.

Around Khufu's pyramid were a large number of traditional mastaba tombs arranged in ranks to the east and west. The eastern cemetery was the most favoured. It seems to have been reserved for the royal family, while officials had to take their place in order on the west. There is no more vivid example of a king, of vastly superior status to his subjects, arranging for his comforts in the afterlife. One other important find associated with Khufu is his magnificent ceremonial boat, found dismantled into over 1,200 pieces in a pit alongside the pyramid. It took some fourteen years to reassemble into a vessel 44 metres long complete with its oars and deckhouse. It may have been the actual boat used to convey the king's body to its burial place, or, alternatively, one for him to use in his afterlife when he would have to accompany Ra in his journey through the night.

Another famous monument of the Giza plateau is the Great Sphinx, the largest stone statue from the ancient world. (The word 'sphinx' is Greek, as many terms describing ancient Egypt are, probably derived from the Egyptian *shesep-ankh*: 'living image'.) It was fashioned from an outcrop of rock left unquarried during the building of the Great Pyramid, possibly because of the poor quality of the stone. It probably represents king Khafra as a man-headed lion. The lion was associated with the sun god and was believed to have guarded the gates of the underworlds of both the eastern and western horizons. The monument thus

suggests some kind of guardianship of the pyramids themselves, linked to Khafra in his role as son of Ra.

It is easy to be so overwhelmed by the sheer size of the pyramids themselves that one forgets the extraordinarily complex problems involved in managing the men and materials needed to build them. A steady supply of stone had to be quarried, shaped, moved, and put into position. The pyramid shape made its own demands. A small error in positioning in the lower layers would cause horrendous problems in the higher ones. Shaping the outside casing called for particular expertise. The whole operation, stretching, as it would have to, over many years, needed organizers of vision. It also required total confidence in the labour force. The mastermind behind the Great Pyramid was one Hemiunu, possibly the nephew of the king, and his life-size statue survives, showing him as a man of presence and confidence, just as one would expect. What incentives were needed to keep so many men toiling for so long can only be guessed at. Contrary to popular opinion, they were not slaves but ordinary peasants, presumably drafted in when their fields were under water from the annual inundation. They were also organized into smaller gangs who may have engaged in rivalry with each other to sustain morale. Each shift appears to have worked for three months and organizing the coming and going of replacements year on year was another administrative challenge. Death and injury, from being crushed to death by stones to debilitating back problems, must have been common.

The background to the building of the pyramids is well known. Their evolution can be traced from Saqqara and earlier. At Giza itself an extensive survey of 12,000 square metres to the south of the complex carried out by Mark Lehner as a Millennium Project has added enormously to the understanding of how the labour force was housed and the techniques it used. Even so the pyramids have provided a rich hunting ground for fantasists. They have been encouraged by a lack of any Egyptian references to the function of the pyramids. In the nineteenth century these fantasists earned themselves the nickname Pyramidiots for their extravagant stories in which the measurements of the pyramids were interpreted to prove everything from the origins of British weights and measures to an outline of history to come. The positioning of the pyramids has been related to star patterns, they have been given a history dating back to 12000 BC or even been said to have been built in two stages many thousands of years apart. Most of these fantasies centre on the Giza pyramids and ignore the many other smaller pyramids that fail to fit the proposed theory.

The simplest explanation for the Giza pyramids is that the pharaohs had become obsessed with the maintenance of their status for all time, an expression in fact of their divinity, and the monumentality of their burial places was the best way of achieving this. Yet the diversion of resources into such great buildings could not be sustained. By the Fifth Dynasty there is some slackening of this intense concentration on the king. Pyramids continue to be built, but these are much smaller and more human in scale. Some Fifth Dynasty kings now transferred their energies to building temples to Ra, taking as their model an original temple at an important cult centre to this god at Heliopolis at the entrance to the Delta. There is some

evidence that the temple priests were becoming more involved in government (or possibly that leading nobles themselves were becoming priests in the service of Ra).

The Collapse of the Old Kingdom

The most important development of all in the Fifth Dynasty was the growth of the power of successful bureaucrats. Possibly as a deliberate royal policy to elevate the king above his subjects, even those of his own family, many administrative posts were now awarded to non-nobles. Their burials, once aligned alongside those of the kings', were transferred to separate cemeteries. Many of these tombs were of great opulence and on a scale that would have been completely unacceptable in earlier times. Previously all achievement, whoever had effected it, had been credited to the king. Now the accomplishments of each official were proclaimed in an autobiography carved on the wall of the tomb, a justification of his right to enjoy offerings from others for eternity. The beautifully painted walls showed off the life of privilege that the owner hoped to enjoy, comfort and good food at home and a steady supply of crops and cattle from his estates. As the owners could no longer rely on their links with the kings for an afterlife, a new philosophy emerged that focused on the relationship of the deceased with the god Osiris. Osiris had originally been associated with agriculture and the reviving power of the annual flood and he now became linked to the continuing life of the deceased who, it was said on their tombs, were 'honoured' by Osiris as reward for their good behaviour on earth. The word for honour, *imakhw*, came to mean the sense of respect and protection that a man would feel for those inferior to him and thus an important ethical concept in Egyptian society. By the end of the Fifth Dynasty, many of the new bureaucratic families had consolidated their authority in the provinces and it was here that they now built their tombs. This, more than anything, marked the relaxing of supreme royal authority.

A number of factors may have coalesced to bring the end of the Old Kingdom in the next dynasty, the Sixth, about 2180 BC. The accounts on the Palermo stone suggest that the Nile floods were consistently lower and there are reports of famine from this time. Yet scholars are now more sensitive to the way disaster was often magnified in texts by those who claimed to have confronted and then overcome it and the archaeological evidence for agricultural contraction is ambiguous. The failure of royal power is better attested. The long reign of Pepy II of the Sixth Dynasty, traditionally put at over ninety years but probably between fifty and seventy years, seems to have led to a gradual fossilization of political affairs. Provincial nobles established their posts on an hereditary basis and placed personal aggrandizement above loyalty to the throne. Dominance over Nubia had been assumed for centuries with powerful rulers such as Sneferu exploiting its resources of gold, ivory, and ebony. This now faltered, with expeditions there in search of gold meeting strong opposition from the local population. There are reports of raids from nomadic tribes on other borders of the kingdom. Signs of impoverishment can also be seen with the tombs of Pepy's courtiers that are now built in mudbrick rather than in stone.

The First Intermediate Period

Pepy II died in about 2175. With the end of the Sixth Dynasty comes what has traditionally been called the First Intermediate Period (c.2160–2055 BC). The historical record is confused. Manetho's so-called Seventh Dynasty does not seem to have ever existed and the Eighth showed a rapid succession of weak kings, seventeen in twenty years. In effect royal authority collapsed and it was inevitable that Egypt would break up into smaller states as ambitious nobles exploited the vacuum of power. At Heracleopolis in Middle Egypt a brutal opportunist called Kheti held sway and claimed to be the successor of the Old Kingdom dynasties. His descendants retained power up to the end of the Intermediate Period (some eighteen or nineteen of the kings of Heracleopolis are known and are grouped together as the Ninth and Tenth Dynasties) but they never seem to have earned the full allegiance of their subjects. Meanwhile a rival dynasty established itself in the south of the kingdom at Thebes, then a remote provincial capital. Its kings extended their power further south into Nubia. In retrospect this was to prove the most important political development of the period but there was nothing inevitable about the eventual success of what was to be the Eleventh 'Theban' Dynasty (discussed below).

The most significant development was the continuing rise of the provincial administrators as important powers in their own right. By this time the system of administration was well established and the local officials highly experienced in running it. These officials would have wanted to keep order not only to maintain their own position but to give them the opportunity to provide tombs and offerings for their own afterlives. An excellent example of the confidence of these provincial rulers comes from the tomb of Ankhtifi (found at el-Mo'alla, south of Thebes). Typically for the period, Ankhtifi's position was one that combined the 'overlord' status of two nomarchs—the governors of provinces, (*nomos*, administrative district, another word that is Greek in origin)—as well as a religious role as 'overseer of priests'.

His 'autobiography' from the tomb is bombastic:

I was the beginning and the end [i.e. the climax] of mankind, since nobody like me existed before, nor will he exist; nobody like myself was ever born nor will he be born. I surpassed the feats of the ancestors, and coming generations will not be able to equal me in any of my feats within this million of years.

I gave bread to the hungry and clothing to the naked; I anointed those who had no cosmetic oil, I gave sandals to the barefooted; I gave a wife to him who had no wife. I took care of the towns of Hefat and Horner in every [situation of crisis when] the sky was clouded and the earth [was parched (?) and when everybody died] of hunger.

[When there was trouble in the neighbouring nome of Thebes] I sailed downstream with my strong and trustworthy troops and moored on the west bank of the Theban nome... and my trustworthy troops searched for battle throughout the Theban nome, but nobody dared to come out through fear of them. (Quoted by Stephan Seidlmayer in *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*.)

Until recently the picture presented of the First Intermediate Period has been pessimistic. This is because it has been associated with a series of texts that detail

social breakdown and despair. One, *The Admonitions of Ipuwer*, talks of a world turned upside-down, with a resulting famine, and rich and poor in upheaval. 'Gold and lapis lazuli, silver and turquoise, carnelian and bronze are hung about the necks of slave girls while noble ladies walk in despair through the land... Little children say [to their fathers] he should never have caused me to live.' (Translation: Rosalie David.) The trouble with this approach is that archaeological evidence does not support it. Recent revaluations of the period stress that the weakening of central control was successfully countered by the rise of efficient local officials who, as has been seen in the example of Ankhtifi, had no inhibitions about proclaiming their achievements, even, in some cases known from Khety's reign, not mentioning their king at all! Insofar as cultural vitality and craftsmanship spread outside the court to the provinces, it can even be viewed as a period of positive achievement, not least in that it showed that Egyptian society could respond creatively to change. A more careful examination of surviving texts shows that *The Admonitions of Ipuwer* may originate after the period and have exaggerated the disorder to justify the reassertion of power by the rulers of the Middle Kingdom or highlight the achievements of a boasting official.

The Emergence of the Middle Kingdom

In about 2055 BC one of the Theban princes, Mentuhotep II of the Eleventh Dynasty, launched a campaign north and eliminated the kingdom of Heracleopolis. There is no archaeological evidence of prolonged warfare and so it is likely that the nomes acquiesced in the takeover. The reunification marks the beginning of the Middle Kingdom. Mentuhotep's progress in reuniting Egypt can be seen in three successive Horus names he took for himself. 'He who breathes life into the heart of the Two Lands' was the first expression of his desire to unify the country. Then, as if to stress his southern origins, 'Divine is the White Crown [of southern Egypt]', and finally, in the thirty-ninth year of his reign when he felt totally secure, 'He who unifies the Two Lands'. His success was reinforced by the declaration of himself as a god and in reliefs he is shown wearing symbols of different deities.

Mentuhotep's concerns went further than unification. He secured the borders of Egypt against raiding nomads and then reasserted Egyptian influence over Nubia. Haunted by the recent loss of such a rich territory, Mentuhotep and his successors of the Twelfth Dynasty aimed at a total domination of the area and its peoples. Their power was expressed in a series of elaborately constructed forts on the Nile between the First and Second Cataracts. When Mentuhotep died he was buried in one of the finest monuments of the Middle Kingdom, a great funerary complex set against a natural amphitheatre of rock on the west bank at Thebes. It is a combination of old styles and new (not least in its recognition of the 'people's' cult of Osiris). As if establishing its links with an older Egypt, the complex has a valley temple, a causeway, 950 metres long, flanked by statues of the king in the form of Osiris, and a mortuary temple. Terraces and walkways give it further spaciousness and it was

surrounded by groves of sycamore and tamarisk trees. What it lacks is a pyramid (although some experts believe that one may have been built on the roof of the mortuary temple). The body was buried under the cliff face itself, while alongside the main complex are the tombs of six 'queens', wives or concubines of Mentuhotep. Close by archaeologists have found a tomb with the remains of sixty men who had been killed in battle. It is possible that these were heroes of the final battle for control of Egypt who were granted the status of lying beside their leader. The complex is a further sign of the ability of the great rulers of Egypt to express their links to the past without compromising their individuality. It is also a demonstration of the growing skills of the stone masons as well as engineers and architects. Sophistication of design rather than monumentality for its own sake is a major feature of the Middle Kingdom building projects.

For the time being no more royal burials took place at Thebes. The Eleventh Dynasty was replaced by the Twelfth about 1985 BC when one Amenemhat seized power. Amenemhat I was a commoner who had risen to the post of king's vizier, 'overseer of officials, lord of judgement, overseer of everything in this entire land', as one boastful inscription from his early career proclaims. He then appears as king himself although how he managed it is not known. Amenemhat was committed to making a new start. Seeking to strengthen his position strategically (there was increasing fear of raids from Asia which a headquarters as far south as Thebes was not well placed to deal with), he founded a new capital at Itj-tawy just south of Memphis in Middle Egypt (its full name reads 'It is Amenemhat who has conquered the Two Lands'). The new foundation also reflects Amenemhat's determination to establish an identity that is distinct from his predecessors. Its architecture shows experimentation with different designs for tombs and other complexes, some drawing on older models. Without rejecting earlier tradition, the capital, 'the Residence' as it was known, showed that artistic creativity could be fostered by an enlightened ruler. Amenemhat also set a new tradition of installing his son as co-regent so that power could pass more smoothly on a king's death and this practice kept his dynasty in power for some two hundred years.

4

Stability and Expansion

Egypt in the Middle and New Kingdoms, 1985–1000 BC

The Years of Stability

For the next 200 years (c.1985–1795 BC) Egypt enjoyed a period of equilibrium. The Middle Kingdom appears in its propaganda as one of the great periods of Egyptian history. At the beginning of the period the tombs of the provincial governors, the nomarchs (and their coffins, in particular), are among the finest in existence. The walls are covered with scenes of hunting, fishing, and the harvesting of abundant crops that they hope to enjoy in their afterlife while the tombs themselves are fronted by pillared façades and placed higher on the hillsides than those of more lowly officials.

Yet lurking behind the serene façade is the ruthless determination of the kings to keep order. As time progresses the ranking of tombs becomes less obvious and the number of smaller ones increases. In contrast the presence of royal monuments asserts itself. This reassertion of royal authority is shown by the extension of monumental building by kings such as Senusret (ruled c.1956–1911 BC) in all the major cult centres of the land—the king is, in fact, challenging the power of local temple elites by overshadowing their buildings with his. There was much closer control of the local nomarchs by state officials and nomarchs were given specific responsibilities, defending a border or leading an expedition overseas, which emphasized their position as servants of the king. While they were away on duty, their local power bases withered and so the authority of the kings increased.

The kings of the Middle Kingdom imposed their influence well beyond the traditional boundaries of Egypt. They controlled Nubia more effectively than ever before, notably during the reign of Senusret III (1870–1831 BC) when an interlocking series of forts and a surveillance system were put in place. They opened up new areas of cultivation in the Fayum, a large oasis area to the west of the river, through an impressive system of dikes and canals. They made the first significant contacts with Asia and the east through expeditions by boat and overland across the Sinai desert. The most important trading centre was Byblos, on the coast of Lebanon, from where cedarwood and resin (used in embalming) were shipped to Egypt. The contacts were so intensive that the local rulers at Byblos adopted Egyptian titles and used hieroglyphs. However, many texts show a distinct hostility towards Asians in general—Senusret describes himself as ‘the throat-slitter of Asia’ and the story of

Joseph's brothers selling him as a slave to an Egyptian master (Genesis 37: 28–36) rings true. There were also some trading contacts with Crete. It would be wrong, however, to overstate Egyptian influence in this period. There is virtually no evidence in the archaeological record of influences from further overseas, while among the records preserved in the great archive at Mari on the Upper Euphrates (destroyed about 1760 BC see p. 30 above) there is not even a mention of Egypt.

The administrative elite of the Middle Kingdom reached an impressive standard of efficiency. Slackness was not tolerated. Officials were expected to be versatile, at one moment leading an army, the next organizing an expedition to bring back stone from a desert quarry, and then administering justice in a courtroom. There was meticulous supervision by the state over every aspect of life. The carpenters in the royal boatyard recorded the movements of even planks and goatskins. The forts on the Nubian border, hundreds of kilometres from the capital, were garrisoned and fed. When workmen had to be assembled to build a pyramid for king Senusret II between the Nile and the Fayum at Kahun, an artificial town was built which could house 9,000 of them, complete with their stores.

The rulers of the Middle Kingdom evolved an ideology that underpinned their rule. It centred on the concept of *ma'at*, harmony achieved through justice and right living. (*Ma'at* was personified as a goddess.) The kings claimed that their duty was to act with restraint so as to preserve the balanced relationship between ruler and gods on which *ma'at* depended. One text put it as follows: the king is on earth 'for ever and ever, judging humanity and propitiating the gods, and setting order [*ma'at*] in place of disorder. He gives offerings to the gods and mortuary offerings to the spirits of the blessed dead.' This involved generosity and forgiveness. A famous story is that of Sinuhe, a minor official in the retinue of Senusret I. Sinuhe has fled Egypt, fearful of the king's anger after some minor incident, and taken refuge in Syria. Years later he is nostalgic for home. He returns to Egypt to throw himself on the mercy of the king and is pardoned and allowed to live with the royal family again and even enjoy a tomb near the king. Such was the image the kings were pleased to portray. Their statues have moved away from the purely monumental to allow hints of their individuality to emerge through the conventional poses. Even here, however, one can sense the absolute power of the kings. Statues of Senusret III portray the conventional image of youth and virility but expressed in a gaze of stern implacability.

Officials collaborated in maintaining the image of a regime committed to moderation and justice. Texts survive in which fathers preach to their sons:

Do not bring down the men of the magistrates' court or incite the just men to rebel. Do not pay too much attention to him clad in shining garments, and have regard for him who is shabbily dressed. Do not accept the reward of the powerful man or persecute the weak for him.

Some of this so-called 'Wisdom Literature' may date from before the Middle Kingdom, but it reflects the ethical spirit of this age.

Similar ideas are reflected in the 'Tale of the Eloquent Peasant', one of the most popular texts of the Middle Kingdom. A peasant is on his way with his loaded

donkeys from the Delta to the Nile valley. He is waylaid by a covetous landowner who tricks him into leading his donkeys over his barley. When one of the donkeys eats a mouthful of barley, the landowner triumphantly confiscates the animal. The rest of the story is taken up with the peasant's search for justice, which he achieves after long-winded displays of eloquence in front of the local magistrate. In a nice touch, the peasant is fed a daily ration while his case is being heard. At the same time his wife is also secretly sent provisions. Despite the enormous persistence required from the wronged peasant, the lesson is that the state will uphold justice and even support the oppressed during their ordeals.

Writing was fundamental to the status of the administrator. 'Be a scribe. Your limbs will be sleek, your hands will grow soft. You will go forth in white clothes honoured with courtiers saluting you,' was the advice given in a Middle Kingdom text, *The Satire of Trades*, which ridiculed all other occupations. The process of learning was a long one—twelve years according to a later Egyptian text. There were many hundreds of signs to learn and, like the calligraphy of Japan and China, the lettering of hieroglyphs became an art form in itself.

Hieroglyphs were a formal script used mainly for carving sacred texts on stone. At their simplest level individual hieroglyphs were pictures of what the scribe wanted to express, a figure of a man for a man, a pyramid for a pyramid (pictograms). The sound of the pictogram could be used also as a syllable in a longer word. The mace was *h(e)dj*, and so the pictogram for a mace was used whenever the sound 'hedj' appeared as a syllable in a word. Some hieroglyphs were used to represent single consonants but the script itself had no vowels. In fact, the symbol for mace was used to express not only the sound 'hedj', but the sound and words represented in 'hadj', 'hidj', 'hodj', and 'hudj'. Extra hieroglyphs often had to be added to make it clear what actual word was being expressed. A mace with a necklace after it, for instance, represented 'silver'. Pictograms could also represent abstract concepts. A papyrus roll stood for writing. The hieroglyph for 'to travel south', against the current of the Nile, was a boat with a sail, while that for 'to travel north', with the current, was a boat with an oar and its sail down. (See Mark Collier and Bill Manley, *How to Read Egyptian Hieroglyphs*, London, 1998.)

For the day-to-day administrative and legal texts that formed the bulk of Egyptian written material, scribes used the hieratic script. Hieratic was a form of shorthand in which the most common hieroglyphic symbols were abbreviated. As time went on it became more and more condensed, in effect a different script from hieroglyphs altogether. Many of the texts were inscribed on papyrus, made from the stem of a marsh plant that was cut into strips that were then pasted together to form a smooth surface. Each sheet measured about 48 × 43 centimetres and could be joined with others in rolls of up to 40 metres. Writing was with a reed, using black carbon with important words highlighted in red ochre.

Texts from the Middle Kingdom suggest a love of learning for its own sake. One father, Kheti, from a humble background himself, talks to his son. 'I shall make you love writing more than your mother—I shall present its beauties to you. Now, it is greater than any trade—there is not its like in the land.' The Middle Kingdom was

seen as the classical age of literature, and its most celebrated stories, such as the two outlined above, were copied and recopied by later generations. Literary texts were, however, only a small part of the total output of administrative documents, medical treatises, funerary inscriptions, and accounts of religious ritual that have also survived.

Another major cultural achievement of the Middle Kingdom was its jewellery. Jewellery had many functions. It served as a sign of status and wealth as well as of royal approval. The king would make presentations to favoured courtiers in a tradition that has lasted to present times. The Order of the Royal Collar, given for bravery in battle, is found as early as the Old Kingdom. Jewellery was also assumed to have magical properties, helping to ward off evil spirits and disease. Certain stones, turquoise and lapis lazuli, for instance, had particular significance. The master craftsmen of the Middle Kingdom have left marvellous examples of crowns and pectorals from the tombs of royal women. Their speciality was *cloisonné* work, the inlay of precious stones within a gold frame.

From earliest times the framework of order and a shared sense of community was maintained by religion. The Egyptians were sensitive to the complexity of spiritual forces and the need to propitiate those gods who could protect them against disorder, destruction, or everyday misfortune. The coherence of religious belief was maintained by absorbing gods into a family and conflict could be rationalized through myths of inter-god conflict such as that between Osiris, Horus, and Seth. The threat of political disunity could be neutralized by merging gods, Ra from Heliopolis in the north with Amun from Thebes further south, for instance. Spiritual forces were represented in human or animal form. Ra is hawk-headed (a hawk soars upwards to the sun) with a sun-disc on his head; Thoth, the god of wisdom, with an ibis head and a scribe's tools in his hand. Seth was always presented as a mischievous creature with a long snout and a forked tail.

At the level of popular religious belief the Middle Kingdom is the period of Osiris. His story, his death and suffering, and rebirth as a saviour who welcomes those who have lived by his rules to another world, is grounded in the ancient ritual of annual renewal found in many other cultures. By the Middle Kingdom the main shrine to Osiris was at Abydos, where tradition had it that his body was reassembled after its mutilation by Seth (see earlier, p. 38). In tomb paintings the body of the deceased is often portrayed visiting Abydos before its final burial. It became the custom for visitors to the cemetery to build a small chapel or cenotaph to act as a permanent memorial for the giver and each year Egyptians flocked to the shrine for a re-enactment of the myths of his rebirth. The celebrations re-enacted a 'funeral', during which his coffin was assailed by his 'enemies', followed by a rebirth and a triumphal return of his cult statue to his temple.

Osiris judges each soul as it comes to him after death. In the texts that explain what is required of a good man, there is the same emphasis on moderation and harmony with the natural world. The deceased promises that he has not killed, fornicated, offended the gods, that he has not taken milk from children, dammed up flowing water, or taken herds from their pastures. It is an attractive code of life,

clearly stated and easily followed by those determined to do so. Reward lies in a joyful and bountiful afterlife, punishment by the gobbling up of the soul and oblivion. There is no threat of eternal punishment as in later less generous religious traditions and no sense of an 'original sin' that diverts the soul towards committing evil.

In every society there is a yawning gap between its ideals and the actual achievements. Whatever their protestations, there is no doubt that the rulers of the Middle Kingdom were formidable men unwilling to brook any opposition to their rule. The only words which have come to us are those of the elite, perhaps 1 per cent of the population, those who would have most benefited from a period of strong government, or who would have been conditioned to accept its ideology. It is known that the middle and lower classes were enlisted to undertake fixed tasks, service in the army or labour, with those attempting to evade service being sent to remote parts of the empire or to work in the stone quarries. Little is known of the mass of peasantry and even less of those peoples such as the Nubians who were colonized during this period, although it is clear that punitive expeditions into Nubia were brutal. However, there is no doubt that the Middle Kingdom does represent one of the pinnacles of Egyptian civilization. After the megalomania of the Fourth Dynasty, there is something refreshing about the more human scale of life in these centuries. In the words of Gae Callender, it was 'an age of tremendous invention, great vision and colossal projects, yet there was also careful and elegant attention to detail in the creation of the smallest items of everyday use and decoration.' It is this combination that attracts.

The Hyksos and the Second Intermediate Period

The decline of the Middle Kingdom, like that of its predecessor, appears to have been gradual. The Twelfth Dynasty came to an end about 1773 BC, and then there was a succession of kings with short reigns. As they assert different lineages, it is possible that power circulated among leading families. Slowly they began losing their grip on the borders of Egypt. In the eastern Delta there was an influx of migrants from Palestine, which was enjoying a period of particular prosperity. By the late eighteenth or early seventeenth century a Semitic-speaking ruling elite which combined Egyptian and Asian cultural traits took charge of the city of Avaris on the eastern Delta, the site of which, long lost, has now finally been identified as the modern Tell el-Dab'a. Aware of their foreign roots, the newcomers called themselves Heqau-khasut, literally 'chiefs of foreign lands'. They are usually referred to by the Greek corruption of this, Hyksos. They provide an intriguing interlude to the flow of Egyptian history.

The settlement at Tell el-Dab'a has been expertly excavated by the Austrian archaeologist Manfred Bietak. Originally it was a frontier city founded by Amenemhat I to mark the border between Egypt and Asia. In the Middle Kingdom it seems to have had both a defensive and a trading role and in the latter it attracted an influx of outsiders from Lebanon and Syria, Palestine, and even Cyprus who, it

seems, intermarried with local Egyptians. There is a cosmopolitan air to the range of artefacts found in the city that include Minoan pottery and jewellery and cylinder seals from Syria. The chronology of the site is hotly contested (in that it is difficult to link the variety of artefacts found to external chronologies) but about 1710 there appears to have been an epidemic in the city—bodies have been found unceremoniously buried in shallow pits.

It is in the period of recovery that a new wealthy elite appears to have gained control just as the Thirteenth Dynasty kings at Itj-tawy were in decline. Their last effective ruler was Sobekhotep about 1725 BC. In Avaris one Nehesy, who was probably Egyptian but may have been Nubian, appears to have seized power and adopted many traditional royal epithets such as 'lord of the two lands'. He linked himself to the 'local' god Seth, normally a god of disorder but now appropriated for the new regime. The Hyksos kingdom of Nehesy and his successors, notably Khyan (ruled c.1610–1580) whose palace has recently been found, mixes features of both Egyptian and Syro-Palestinian cultures and gained immense prosperity from trade. The texts speak of imports of 'chariots and horses, ships, timber, gold, lapis lazuli, silver, turquoise, bronze, axes without number, oil, incense, fat and honey'. Avaris grew fast—eventually to three times the size of any contemporary site in Palestine.

Then came expansion to the south. Khyan was especially determined to prove himself king of all Egypt in the traditional style of his adopted country. He took a Horus name of 'He who embraces the banks of the Nile' to signify his ambition. Itj-tawy and Memphis were overrun and a border with Upper Egypt defined at Kis on the Nile some 200 kilometres south of Memphis. While Avaris was regarded as the capital of the dynasty, control of northern Egypt was enforced from Memphis, which was much better placed strategically than Avaris for direct supervision of the Nile. The Avaris kings used pathways across the desert to forge links with Nubia, where the weakening of Egyptian power had led to the emergence of the independent kingdom of Kush. Its capital, Kerma, a religious as much as a political centre, flourished between 1750 and 1500 overseeing an extensive network of trade which included close contact with the kingdoms to the north.

The confusions surrounding Manetho's list of dynasties for this period have now been resolved. Manetho's Fourteenth and Fifteenth Dynasties are believed to represent the Avaris kings while the Sixteenth and Seventeenth represent a rival set of kings who maintained power in Thebes and who saw themselves as direct heirs of the Thirteenth Dynasty. Their kingdom was hemmed in by the Avaris rulers to the north and the kingdom of Kush to the south, so they were isolated and vulnerable. There is a heavy stress in their inscriptions on military prowess but at first there was little they could do and they were forced to coexist with the Hyksos rulers. There is some evidence of trading contacts, and the daughter of the Hyksos king Apepi may even have married into the Theban royal family.

However, at some point after 1550 BC, the Theban kings consolidated their power and, having seen off an invasion from Kush, marched north. The first campaign was launched by Kamose (ruled c.1555–1550), the last king of the Seventeenth Dynasty. Apepi panicked and a letter (intercepted by Kamose) shows him begging the ruler

of Kush for help against the Theban invader, promising him land in southern Egypt in return. Kamose's successor, the formidable Ahmose I (c.1550–1525), entered the Delta itself, first taking Memphis and isolating Avaris from Palestine so that he could capture it. The archaeological evidence shows that the Hyksos were armed only with copper weapons while the Thebans had the much harder bronze. The survivors were expelled and large areas of the city were completely abandoned. The citadel was destroyed and giant store-rooms built on the site.

Ahmose's achievement was recognized in making him founder of a new dynasty, the Eighteenth. A set of new palaces was then constructed at Avaris that are notable for their Minoan frescos. Although these are in fragments and will take many years to reconstruct, they have led to the revival of an ancient tradition that Ahmose married a Cretan princess although they are now dated somewhat later, to the early fifteenth century BC. Whether they represent diplomatic exchanges or actual trade they show that the Hyksos had opened Egypt up to the wider world of the Ancient Near East and the eastern Mediterranean at a crucial moment when a group of powerful states were emerging (see earlier, p. 34). Finally Ahmose struck eastwards into Palestine itself and then, the borders with Asia secure, he returned south to restore Egyptian control over Nubia. The scene was now set for the New Kingdom, a period of stability which lasted for 500 years and involved a massive expansion of Egyptian power into Asia.

The Emergence of the New Kingdom

After Ahmose's spectacular success, unity and stability returned to Egypt. There was a very different atmosphere to the New Kingdom (1550–1069 BC). While the Hyksos can be credited with opening Egypt to the wider world of the Ancient Near East, they were forever damned by the new rulers as foreign usurpers, whose crimes could be used to rally Egyptian nationalists. The state was militarized with, for the first time, a standing army. The energy of the destructive power of Seth, the ruling god of Avaris, was appropriated by the new regime and redirected at Egypt's enemies. Thutmose I (1504–1492 BC) reached the Euphrates and defeated the state of Mitanni in Syria. With control established over the cities of Palestine, local princes, supervised by Egyptian garrisons, were used to maintain the new empire intact.

As in previous dynasties, the kings of the New Kingdom also established firm control over Nubia. It is Thutmose I who is credited with the defeat of the Kingdom of Kush. 'The Nubian bowmen fall by the sword and are thrown aside on their lands; their stench floods their valleys... the pieces cut from them are too much for the birds carrying off the prey to another place,' the king records on a rock face near the victory. Egyptian rule was imposed further south than ever before, down to the Fourth Cataract and probably beyond. A frontier post was established at Napata, under the shadow of a table mountain, Gebel Barkal, which acted as a landmark for traders coming across the desert. For the first time the Egyptians could now directly control the trade routes with their rich harvest of exotic goods coming from

central Africa. The Nubian gold mines were also worked so intensively that by the end of the New Kingdom they had become exhausted.

It took some time for the New Kingdom to build up its strength. Despite his military successes, Ahmose did not reopen the limestone quarries at Tura until late in his reign. His own buildings were all in mudbrick. His successor, Amenhotep I (1525–1504 BC), portrayed himself as an aggressive warrior king (his Horus name was ‘Bull who conquers the lands’), but the evidence is of twenty years of peace and stability. All the usual signs of Egyptian prosperity now returned. New temples were built in Thebes and Nubia, and raw materials started to flow in to support a resurgence of artistic activity. Thebes was particularly honoured as the city from which the dynasty had sprung and the god Amun was glorified as its protective god. Amun’s temple at Thebes was wonderfully decorated with reliefs showing the king presenting offerings to the god and being presented in his turn with offerings from the priests.

Shortly afterwards the dynasty produced a rarity in Egyptian history, a ruling queen. There had been signs of the growing power of the queens early in the Eighteenth Dynasty. Both Ahmose’s mother and wife seem to have been formidable women who had cults dedicated to them at Thebes. Ahmose’s sister-wife Ahmose-Nefertari had been proclaimed God’s Wife of Amun. This gave her immediate control over the vast wealth of the god’s temple at Thebes. Hatshepsut, the niece of Amenhotep I and daughter of his successor Thutmose I, went further. Hatshepsut had married her half-brother, king Thutmose II. She had no sons, but Thutmose II had one by a concubine who, although still only a boy, succeeded as Thutmose III on the death of his father in 1479 BC. Hatshepsut was accepted as co-regent. Many early reliefs show her dutifully accompanying the young king as he fulfils the royal rituals but she was only biding her time. She soon took absolute power for herself, claiming that she was ruler by right as the heir of Thutmose I.

Every successful Egyptian ruler had to establish himself within a well-established ideology of kingship. For a woman this presented an almost insurmountable problem and Hatshepsut defined her image carefully. In some representations—sculptures, for instance—she was happy to present herself as female, and she took a female Horus name, ‘The She-Horus of fine gold’. In more conventional settings, however, such as temple reliefs, she is shown as male, dressed in male clothes, even being shown with a regal beard! She also made great play of her divine ancestry, spelling out the details of her conception by Amun in the temple she built at Deir el-Bahri. There is an evocative description of how the god, in the disguise of Thutmose I, came to her mother’s bed and was aroused by her. ‘His love passed into her body; the palace was filled with divine fragrance.’ And so she was divinely conceived. In one inscription she even rewrites history to suggest that it is she who finally brought the rule of the hated Hyksos to an end and is now in a position to restore Egypt to its original purity. It is a fascinating example of the ways in which Egyptian rulers, particularly those who were outsiders, were able to define themselves within conventional ideologies of power.

Hatshepsut ruled for some fifteen years. It was a successful and stable reign and a peaceful one too, perhaps because the one section of Egyptian society Hatshepsut could not trust entirely was the army and so she never used it. She was the first of the New Kingdom rulers to have effective control over Middle Egypt, and a mass of new temples were built there. At Karnak, just north of Thebes, she created a vast new gateway to Amun's temple that was embellished by six huge statues of herself. Hatshepsut was blessed with an outstanding chief official, Senenmut, a man of humble family who worked his way up to a position of far-reaching power. (Inevitably there were suggestions that he was the queen's lover. Graffiti of the time have even been found showing a female pharaoh with a lover. The intimacy of his relationship with the royal family is confirmed by a charming statue, now in the British Museum, of him nursing the queen's only child, her daughter by Thutmose II.)

Senenmut's talents and interests were wide-ranging, as was typical for leading officials of the court. His tomb was decorated with astronomical symbols and contained the classics of Middle Kingdom religious literature. One of his greatest achievements, in his role of chief architect, was the mortuary temple he built for his queen at Deir el-Bahri, running along the northern side of the imposing tomb of Mentuhotep, founder of the Middle Kingdom. It is a dramatic site to visit. There was a causeway from the valley that, as it neared the main complex, was lined with a hundred sphinxes bearing the head of the queen. Then a succession of terraces supported by colonnades led up into the natural amphitheatre of the hillside with side chapels commemorating Thutmose I, Amun, and the goddess Hathor, the most popular of the Egyptian goddesses, protectress of kingship. Finally, a passage cut in the rock face led to an inner sanctuary. The complex echoes that of Mentuhotep but again it is unique and reinforces the theme of continual reinvention in the iconography of kingship.

Hatshepsut was not buried in the temple herself. She prepared two tombs for herself in the valleys behind. Her father, king Thutmose I, had been the first king to choose a desolate valley behind Deir el-Bahri for his own tomb (although there is also some evidence that Amenhotep I may have been buried there). Later to become celebrated as the Valley of the Kings, it was to be home to sixty-two tombs, nearly all of them of royalty. Hatshepsut's choice was also a premonition, perhaps, that her body would not be left undisturbed. (For the Valley of the Kings see Nicholas Reeves and Richard Wilkinson, *The Complete Valley of the Kings*, London and New York, 1996.)

One of the most celebrated reliefs on Hatshepsut's complex commemorates an expedition to the land of Punt, possibly staged as a publicity stunt to make up for her lack of military activity. (It certainly aroused enormous excitement at the time.) There are references to this mysterious land as early as the Old Kingdom. Punt was probably along the African shores of the southern Red Sea, although no one site has ever been identified. Hatshepsut's reliefs suggest a journey through the Red Sea, and at Punt itself there are pictures of tree houses and tropical fauna (as well as the queen of Punt, depicted with a swollen and curved body). The fruits of these expeditions included aromatic plants, used for incense, ebony, electrum, and short-horned

cattle, and it seemed that the traders lingered there for about three months at a time, perhaps waiting for favourable winds with which to return home. The exotic goods were used to glorify Amun, her 'father', whose temples at Karnak received yet more embellishment.

Hatshepsut disappears from the record about 1458 BC. There is some suggestion that Senenmut turned against her and assured that Thutmose III achieved sole power. For a time Hatshepsut's memory survived untarnished but some twenty years into Thutmose's reign the hieroglyphs representing her name were systematically erased from every monument, even from the tips of obelisks. Once the precedent had been set an aggressive campaign of smashing her statues followed. This was a devastating fate for any Egyptian, as the survival of their inscribed name was one way in which an afterlife could be ensured. The comprehensive removal of Hatshepsut's name may be a sign of the spite of Thutmose for his powerful step-mother, but probably the main objective was to restore an ordered and comprehensible past focused once again on male kingship.

In the reign of Thutmose III as sole ruler (1458–1425 BC) the New Kingdom was threatened with the loss of control in Asia. The kingdom of Mitanni, earlier defeated by Thutmose I, was now challenging Egypt for the control of the Levant. It attempted to undermine Egyptian rule by stirring up rivalries between the cities of Palestine. Thutmose led no less than seventeen campaigns in Asia, proudly recording their results on the walls of the temple of Amun at Karnak. One of his most famous battles was at Megiddo, where the king, against all professional advice (and this is something he stressed in order to maintain his status as a far-seeing monarch), took his armies through a difficult mountain pass to emerge behind his enemies and defeat them. The booty was magnificent and meticulously listed at Karnak, 894 chariots, now an accoutrement of every warrior, 200 suits of armour, 2,000 horses, and 25,000 other animals. With control over Palestine re-established, and maintained for the next 400 years, Thutmose took on Mitanni itself, even launching a successful crossing of the Euphrates. He also imposed his rule forcefully on Nubia. The land was now being exploited directly by Egyptian institutions, with the result that much of the indigenous culture was eradicated.

In royal mythology Thutmose was portrayed as one of the great kings of Egypt. He was far more than a successful conqueror. He had an acute sense of his place in history as the successor of a long line of Theban kings. A list of his ancestors was set up in the temple at Karnak and was treated with special reverence. He was also a man of culture and curiosity. He was an enthusiastic reader of ancient texts, and is believed to have composed literary works of his own. In contrast to his predecessors he was clearly impressed by Syrian culture and his three wives may have been Syrian themselves. Marbled glass from Syria becomes a popular luxury item. Thutmose even brought back examples of the flowers and plants of Syria, depicting them in a botanical scene on the temple wall at Karnak. His opposition to Mitanni encouraged Mitanni's other enemies to send him gifts, lapis lazuli from Babylon, silver, gems, and wood from the Hittites. There is, in short, a much more relaxed

and positive approach to the outside world and the children of the elite were now taught how to read Babylonian cuneiform.

There is an interesting contrast between the imperial propaganda of the pharaohs—the name is now used for the first time—and the reality of their actions. A pharaoh had to incorporate an aura of invincibility into his image. Thutmose's successor Amenhotep II (1427–1400 BC) gloried in the role of war hero. His ebullient Horus name, 'Powerful bull with great strength', is echoed in legends which tell how he hunted lions on foot and killed Syrian princes with his own hands. However, much of this was for home consumption. In the twenty-seven years of Amenhotep's reign, there were actually only two Syrian campaigns and gradually the pharaohs began to realize the importance of diplomatic solutions. Under Amenhotep's successor Thutmose IV (1400–1390 BC) peace was made with Mitanni. The Mitannians were worried about the rise of the Hittite empire to the north, and they were quite content to hold northern Syria against the growing threat while allowing Egyptian rule to continue in Palestine. It is in Thutmose's reign that one sees a shrinking in the number of military officials and the consolidation of civil administration. Peace was secured when Amenhotep III (1390–1352 BC) married the daughter of the Mitannian king. The reality of international relations in this period can be seen in the Amarna letters (see Interlude 1).

The Administration of the New Kingdom

The structure of the New Kingdom administration is well known. The king presided over three departments of government. The first was his own family. This could be large: Rameses II (1279–1213 BC), for instance, was said to have fathered 160 children. While the royal family had immense status, not many of its members seem to have been given political power. The king was presumably careful not to encourage those with royal blood to build up positions of influence. There were exceptions, however. The heir might be given command of the army, and there was a traditional role for the queen, or eldest daughter of the king, as Chief Priestess of Amun. (As it was believed that the eldest son of the queen had been conceived in her by Amun, who, by this time, had replaced Ra in this role, this was no more than her due and made her position unassailable.) Through her the king had direct access to the wealth of the temples.

The second department of government oversaw the empire in Nubia and Asia. Apart from Nubia, where the ecology was very similar to what they were used to, the Egyptians were not successful colonizers. Their world was so dependent on the ordered environment of the Nile valley that they found it very difficult to adapt to life outside. When Egyptian armies reached the Euphrates they were completely bewildered by it, never having encountered water flowing southwards. The best they could manage was 'water that goes downstream in going upstream'!

Ultimately the Egyptians depended on military force to sustain their rule, and for the first time in Egyptian history the kings raised a large army, of perhaps between

15,000 and 20,000 men. It was divided into battalions of infantry and charioteers, each battalion fighting under the name of a god. A large proportion of the troops consisted of levies raised within the empire itself. However, the army was expensive and difficult to maintain and soldiering was never popular. In practice most kings contented themselves with punitive raids into Asia or Nubia early in their reigns, as much for propaganda purposes as for suppression of rebels, and then returned to a more settled life in their courts. The normal pattern of administration was indirect, with Egyptian governors, supported by envoys and garrisons, ruling through vassal princes. The governors were responsible for maintaining order and collecting taxes, tribute, and raw materials. Thutmose III, the most successful conqueror of Asia, initiated a policy of bringing back Palestinian princes to Egypt as hostages for the good behaviour of their home cities.

The empire was an important source of raw materials. This had always been the case with Nubia, but Asia also provided booty from the wars and openings for trade. The grain harvests of the plain of Megiddo were appropriated by Thutmose III, tin came from Syria, copper from Cyprus, and silver, valued in Egypt more highly than gold, from Cilicia in southern Anatolia. If the temple inscriptions are to be believed, prisoners were brought back to Egypt in their thousands, and foreigners are to be found as artisans, winemakers, servants, and mercenaries. With them came Asiatic gods and goddesses, among them Astarte, the goddess of horse-riders, who were adopted within the Egyptian pantheon.

The third department of government was concerned with internal administration. This was subdivided into four offices, one each for the administration of the royal estates, the army, the overseeing of religious affairs, and internal civil administration. Each was headed by a small group of advisers, perhaps twenty to thirty at any one time, who were often intimates of the king. The country was divided into two administrative areas, one, Upper Egypt, based on Thebes and the other on Memphis. The success of civil administration was dependent on the personality of the ruler. It was he and only he who could infuse the necessary energy into maintaining the links with the provincial governments stretched out along hundreds of kilometres of valley. Smaller centres had mayors, who were responsible for collecting taxes, probably a tenth of total produce, and carrying out orders from above. Criminal cases and the countless property disputes that arose over land that disappeared under water for four months of the year were dealt with by councils of soldiers, priests, and bureaucrats.

The more opulent of the officials' tombs, such as Sennefer, mayor of Thebes in the reign of Amenhotep II, show the deceased boasting of his achievements and closeness to the king. 'One who satisfies the heart of the king' is how Sennefer describes himself. His wonderfully decorated tomb has remained intact but Amenhotep's chief steward, one Qenamum, was not so lucky. The paintings in his tomb were all defaced after his death, suggesting that tensions and jealousies lingered behind the serene façade of good government. The tradition dating back to the Old Kingdom that administration was just, that rights of succession were respected, famine and poor relief distributed, and the voices of the poor listened to was reiterated but it

cannot have been the reality. There are records of the harshness of officials collecting taxes and certainly no evidence at all that the life of the tillers of the fields improved in any way. While the kings clearly desired to sustain an ordered and functioning society, this was a 'welfare state' only in fantasy.

Kings and Temples

The zenith of the New Kingdom was achieved in the long reign of Amenhotep III (1390–1352 BC). Up to now the kings had always kept some distance from the gods but Amenhotep saw himself already as divine. Some reliefs show him making offerings to himself! He identified with 'the radiant solar disc' and so put in place the identification of the ruler and the sun god that was to mark an important shift in royal ideology. His building programme was the most ambitious and ostentatious so far known and the king delighted in magnificent jubilee festivals, even going so far as to dig out enormous harbours alongside the Nile in which he and his chief wife Tiye could display themselves to their subjects from the water.

One of the offshoots of this strategy was a series of statues, from different phases of Amenhotep III's life, that are among the most remarkable creations of Egyptian art. On the west bank, the Colossi, two vast statues of the king, a total of 720 tonnes in weight, still sit before what was originally his expansive mortuary temple, though this is now largely disintegrated. The most magnificent of his surviving buildings are the temples to Amun and the 'mother goddess' Mut at Thebes. Thebes was sacred as the base from which the kings of the Eleventh and Twelfth Dynasty and later the Eighteenth Dynasty had unified Egypt and Amun was sustained as its protective god. He was an unseen god of the air (the word Amun means 'the hidden one'), though in his 'animal' form he was portrayed as a human being.

As early as the Middle Kingdom, Amun had been syncretized with the traditional sun god Ra to form a composite god Amun-Ra and the relationship was emphasized even further by Amenhotep III. At the start of Amenhotep's reign the major temple to Amun was at Karnak where a complex of buildings for his cult had been developed by the early New Kingdom rulers (including Hatshepsut). Now Amun was credited with the victories of the New Kingdom, and the exploits of the warrior kings were proclaimed in reliefs on a new massive temple that Amenhotep III built on an almost virgin site at Luxor, 3 kilometres south of Karnak. The colonnade of sphinxes connecting the two is even now being excavated.

The temples of Luxor and Karnak were built as residences of the gods with all the exclusivity that that implied. They were approached by long avenues, lined in the case of Amun by ram-headed sphinxes. (The ram was the sacred animal of Amun.) Their entrances were guarded by pylons, massive stone gateways, and through them was a series of courts and colonnades which led to the sanctuary of the god. Amenhotep added a 'solar' court to his temples to Amun, a colonnaded space left open to the sun, in recognition of the greater role Ra was to play within the worship of Amun. Further inside the temple complex the courts were roofed. As the holy

of holies was approached through anterooms, ceilings became lower and the floors higher to represent the original mound from which creation was believed to have emerged. The light was also restricted so that when the sanctuary was reached the cult statue of the god stood almost in darkness. (On Egyptian temples start with Richard Wilkinson, *The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt*, London and New York, 2000.)

In theory the king was the only person of sufficient divinity to be able to undertake the rituals involved in feeding and sustaining the *ka* of the god. In his absence select priests were allowed in to act as his representatives. To purify themselves for entry, they and the vessels they used were ritually washed in the sacred pool that was an important feature of each temple. Then they would make a dignified approach to the sanctuary, breaking the door seals that protected the god each night. Each day the statue was anointed and clothed in fresh linen and the prescribed prayers recited before it.

The only chance the public had to participate in the temple rituals of Thebes was at the great festivity of Opet that took place each year at that joyful time when the Nile floods reappeared in the valley. This festival linked the new temple of Amenhotep III with that at Karnak. The statue of Amun, clothed in gold and jewels, was taken from its sanctuary at Karnak, mounted on a sacred barque, and carried to the side of the Nile. It was then sailed down to visit the temple of Amun at Luxor. Along the bank of the Nile the spectators danced and sang, waved standards, or prostrated themselves before the passing god.

The temples were not simply religious institutions in the modern sense of the word. They were an integral part of the administration of the state. The High Priest of Amun at Thebes might be a priest who had been promoted, but he could also have been picked from the senior courtiers or army generals. Among his responsibilities were the granaries, the artisans working on the royal tombs, and public works in general. The temples enjoyed vast wealth, much of it from endowments made by the king, probably in the expectation that a proportion of the resulting produce would be paid back to the state. An estimate of the land belonging to the temple of Amun at Karnak alone in the late New Kingdom is 2,400 square kilometres, almost a quarter of the total cultivated land of Egypt. A labour force of over 80,000 is recorded. The temples of Amun at Thebes had a total income of nearly two million sacks of grain a year.

The Cult of Aten

Yet Amenhotep III had overdone it. By the end of his reign, c.1350 BC, the temples were so rich that they had become his political and economic rivals. Even before his death, the king seems to have distanced himself from the influence of Thebes. He brought up his own son, also Amenhotep, in Memphis and is found patronizing other cults in northern Egypt—that of the sacred bulls at Saqqara and the sun god at Heliopolis, for instance. For the first time in Amenhotep's reign a new cult

appears, the worship of the sun in its physical form, Aten. Amenhotep's son and successor, Amenhotep IV, better known as Akhenaten, 'He who is beneficial to the Aten' (1352–1336 BC), was to attempt a religious and social revolution, installing Aten as a single god in place of the traditional gods of Egypt. (See, as a good study, Cyril Aldred, *Akenaten, King of Egypt*, London and New York, 1991.)

The worship of a sun god was well established in Egyptian religion. Each sunrise was seen as a symbolic re-enactment of the first creation and sun worship was also common among the cultures of the Middle East over which Egypt ruled. If Akhenaten had done no more than emphasize Aten among the other gods of Egypt he would probably have caused no stir. Whether inspired by his father or not, he set out on an unprecedented, even bizarre path of his own. He launched an attack on all other gods, in particular Amun, to install himself as a direct mediator between his people and Aten. Iconographically the shift is shown by depicting Aten as a disc with rays ending in hands that touch the king and his family. The family is emphasized by the elevation of Akhenaten's wife Nefertiti so that the royal couple appear as the twin children of Aten.

Akhenaten's motives for this religious revolution are not clear. He may have been under the influence of his father, with whom he had possibly been co-regent before he had died (not all scholars agree on this), or his mother, the formidable queen Tiye, who lived on into the new reign. He may simply have been trying to assert his own independence from the power of the temples or genuinely have developed his own religious beliefs. Whatever his motives he had set himself a massive task. Religious belief was so deeply embedded in the Egyptian world picture that Akhenaten was, in effect, challenging the intellectual structure of the state.

The impact was profound. Many temples were closed down and their goods were confiscated. The economic structure of the state was upset as lands were transferred directly to the king. The masses lost their festivals so that the rhythm of the year was disrupted. As the reign went on the persecution of Amun became more intense. His name and even any reference to 'gods' in the plural was erased from the temples. Such a dramatic revolution could never have been effected if Akhenaten had not kept the support of the army.

The earliest temple to Aten was built by Akhenaten at Thebes. It had a distinct precinct of its own and judging from the quality of its reliefs it was constructed in haste. It proved too close to the stronghold of Amun. Five years after his accession Akhenaten moved his capital downriver to a virgin site in Middle Egypt. It was named Akhetaten but is better known under its modern name Tell el-Amarna. The move presumably reflected the king's desire to break free completely from the weight of Egyptian tradition, and the elite of officials from Thebes and Memphis, but there were other reasons. Among the cliffs of the east bank at Tell el-Amarna there was a natural opening into a valley and through this could be caught the first glimpse of the rising sun. The city's impressive temple to Aten was aligned with the valley, and unlike the traditional closed sanctuaries of Amun was left open to the skies. Aten was always used to emphasize the positive aspects of life, day rather than night, rebirth rather than death, light rather than darkness. Most of the reliefs and

paintings of Akhenaten show him directly under the sun, whose rays, each capped with a small hand, reach down to him.

A hymn to Aten survives, inscribed on a tomb in Amarna. One verse reads:

Earth brightens when you dawn in the horizon
 When you shine as Aten of daytime:
 As you dispel the darkness,
 As you cast your rays,
 The Two Lands are in festivity.
 Awake they stand on their feet,
 As you have roused them.
 Bodies are cleansed and clothed,
 The arms held high in adoration of your appearance.
 The entire land sets out to work,
 All beasts browse on their herbs,
 Trees and herbs are sprouting;
 Birds fly from their nests,
 Their wings greeting your *ka*;
 All flocks frisk on their feet,
 And all that fly up and alight,
 They lived when you dawn for them.
 Ships sail upstream and downstream,
 The roads lie open when you rise;
 The fish in the river leap before you,
 And your rays are in the midst of the sea.

This exuberant paean to Aten was expressed in a vernacular very different from the elevated official language and it proved influential, not least as an inspiration to the psalmists of Israel who were themselves composing hymns of praise to a single god. However, in Egypt itself, the new religion did not catch on. For the mass of people there was no incentive to turn away from traditional religious practices that were so deeply integrated into everyday life. Egyptian religion was astonishingly flexible at a popular level. There was a plethora of gods that could take on different identities and attributes to meet different human and spiritual needs. They were grouped together or merged as composite gods in a rich mythology that covered creation and the afterlife. To replace them by a single physical entity, available only in one form, was a cultural shock far greater than the Egyptians could absorb. Even the workmen building at Tell el-Amarna stayed loyal to their traditional gods.

The failure of Aten does not make the reign of Akhenaten any less interesting. He was a strong king who focused the kingdom on himself as the only mediator with his god. By confiscating the goods of the temples he strengthened his political position and he appears to have been well in control of the administration. He was one of those rare Egyptians who introduced important cultural changes. He was represented with his wife Nefertiti and his family in much more informal and realistic poses than was conventional. It was as if the royal family now replaced the mythological families of the gods. Some portraits even show him with a unique physiognomy including a bloated stomach, an extraordinary departure from the accepted

portraiture of a king. He also moved away from the classical language conventionally used in texts to introduce his own artificial language, half classical, half in the popular idiom, to further emphasize his own identity. In short, there was a loosening of Egyptian traditions to allow a much more freely expressed style of art.

Tell el-Amarna was situated well away from the flood line of the Nile and its abandonment after Akhenaten's death meant that much has been learned from excavation (carried out since 1977 by the English archaeologist Barry Kemp and now described in detail in his *The City of Akhenaten and Nefertiti: Amarna and its People*, London, 2012). It was carefully planned out within an area defined by fourteen boundary steles. Enough remains to plot out the royal palaces, the adjoining harems, the Great Temple to Aten, and the administrative offices. There is a set of gardens, and suburbs containing the homes of the administrators. A workmen's village, complete with walls that enclosed its inhabitants at night, is reminiscent of that further south at Deir el-Medina. (See Chapter 5.)

The plan of Tell el-Amarna has much to tell about the nature of royal administration. The king and his family had their private residence set well apart from the rest of the city in the north and easy to defend. The ceremonial centre of the city was connected to the residential palace by a processional route along which the king would parade each day, his golden chariot followed by an entourage with the populace applauding him as he passed. He eventually reached a second, even grander, palace designed for the king's public appearances and his reception of foreign envoys. Its core was an enormous courtyard with colossal statues of the king surrounding it. Its pavement was decorated with images of foreign peoples over which the royal chariot would clatter in a perpetual reminder that Akhenaten held sway over an empire. The king and queen handed out honours to officials from a 'Window of Appearances', in effect a balcony from which they could display themselves. Amarna may have been the home of a particularly forceful and independent king, but its layout shows how carefully the power of a ruler could be stage managed for effect and linked closely to control of its officials.

When Akhenaten died in about 1336 BC the country was left in some confusion. His successor (who may have been Nefertiti 'disguised' with a male name, Smenkharu) lived only a few months and it was a boy, Tutankhaten, the son of Akhenaten by another wife, who succeeded. His name suggests that the worship of Aten was still officially practised, but within a year the king's name had been changed to Tutankhamun and the city at Tell el-Amarna had been abandoned. A 'Restoration Decree' issued in the young king's name bemoaned the decay of the temples and the abandonment of Egypt by the gods. There was a major reaction to the cult of Aten. Nobles, for instance, now built their tombs as small temples as if to reassert public control of religion and filled them with wall paintings and statues of the traditional gods. (Osiris quickly reasserted his position as the most important funerary god.) With Akhenaten now being presented as having betrayed his people and the cosmic order, it is possible that no pharaoh was ever given the same degree of respect as his predecessors. The god Amun becomes a universal transcendent god manifested through the other gods of Egypt but approachable by those who believe in him. 'Far

away he is as one who sees, near he is as one who hears,' as one text put it, and Amun is seen as able to intervene directly in believers' lives.

Tutankhamun never emerged as ruler in his own right. By the age of 19 he was dead, possibly from a cerebral haemorrhage, or from an infection in a leg that had been broken. It is also possible that his death was deliberate, to remove him before he assumed full power for himself. Whatever the cause, he was treated as a king deserved and honoured with the full rituals of death. It was by sheer chance, probably because the site of the tomb was forgotten and blocked by the debris from later tunnelling, that his tomb in the Valley of the Kings survived intact until rediscovered in 1922 by the British archaeologist Howard Carter. The completeness of the finds, the rich array of grave goods, and the poignant story of the king who had died so young led to a wave of 'Tutmania' that swept across the world in the 1920s. (For the excavation and contents of the tomb see Nicholas Reeves, *The Complete Tutankhamun: The King, the Tomb, the Royal Treasure*, London and New York, 1995.)

The Nineteenth Dynasty: The Last of the Great Egyptian Dynasties

On the death of Tutankhamun the Eighteenth Dynasty was virtually exhausted. The land was still in disruption. There may have been a desperate attempt by Tutankhamun's widow, a half-sister, to find a Hittite husband and keep the dynasty alive. If so she was thwarted by a general, Horemheb, who exploited the vacuum to seize power. Horemheb saw himself as the restorer of traditional order. He extended his reign backwards so as to delete that of Akhenaten and his successors and is officially recorded as a member of the Eighteenth Dynasty. His tomb, at Saqqara, depicts him as a tough commander, his captives from the Near East and Nubia shown prostrate before him awaiting whatever fate he decreed. He was especially harsh on corruption in the court. He built heavily at Karnak, tearing down Akhenaten's temple to Aten and using its blocks for his own needs. With no male heir, he passed on the kingdom to a fellow general who, as king Rameses I, was to be the founder of the Nineteenth Dynasty, the last to see Egypt as a great power.

Rameses' family was from the eastern Delta and the centre of power now shifted back towards the north. The priests of Thebes may have regained their temples, but during the remaining years of the New Kingdom they were never to be allowed to rebuild their political influence. The family had no royal blood and when Rameses' son Sety I succeeded him about 1294 BC the new king shrewdly tried to conceal this by having himself portrayed on a stone relief alongside sixty-nine predecessors in a line stretching back to Narmer, the supposed founder of a united Egypt. Significantly, Hatshepsut and Akhenaten and his immediate successors were omitted. The past had to be ordered within the traditional ideology of kingship. To reinforce his position, and complete the restoration of the old gods, Sety built temples in all the major religious centres of Egypt. The finest was in Abydos where the relief of his predecessors ran along a corridor. The halls led not to one sanctuary (that of Osiris),

as was conventional, but to seven so integrating a wider group of deities in his support. Thebes was also shown special patronage. The temple to Amun at Karnak received a vast new columned hall. Avaris was revived as a northern capital and its temple to Seth restored.

The Egyptian empire was now under the threat of a new enemy, the Hittite empire, which at its height in the late fourteenth century extended across the central Anatolian plateau, over much of what had been the kingdom of Mitanni and south into the Levant. (See Chapter 2 for further details of the Hittites.) Conflict along the northern boundaries of the Egyptian empire seemed certain, and already in the reign of Sety I new campaigns had to be launched into Asia to reimpose Egyptian control there. The most famous battle against the Hittites was that waged in about 1275 BC by Sety I's son Rameses II (c.1279–1213 BC) at Qadesh, the town in Syria that had been unofficially recognized as the border of the Egyptian empire. King faced king, each with a vast array of chariots and infantry. On the temple walls of Egypt Rameses presented the resulting battle as a crushing victory. However, with accounts also surviving from Hittite sources it is possible to see that the Egyptian army was lucky to escape intact from the mass of Hittite chariotry. In fact, the campaign was a stalemate, and Rameses was sensible enough to realize the dangers of campaigning so far from home against such a strong empire. About 1263 BC he made a Treaty of Alliance with the Hittites. It was engraved on silver tablets. The Treaty brought his military career to an end. However much Rameses boasted his supremacy as an all-powerful Egyptian king, the evidence suggests that each kingdom respected the strength of each other. (T. G. H. James, *Ramesses II*, New York, 2003 and Joyce Tyldesley's *Ramesses: Egypt's Greatest Pharaoh*, London and New York, 2001, are both excellent biographies.)

Rameses' primary motive for applauding his 'victory' may have been to reinforce his political position—his account suggests that he had galvanized a set of incompetent generals into action. He asserted himself in more traditional ways with a building programme that was nothing short of megalomaniac. Nearly half the temples that still stand in Egypt date from his reign. One of his most famous legacies is the great temple of Abu Simbel, rescued and rebuilt by UNESCO in the 1960s when Lake Nasser threatened to engulf it after the building of the Aswan dam. The temple, at the southern extremity of Egyptian rule, was clearly designed to show off the awesome reality of the king's power over his Nubian subjects. Four colossal statues of Rameses, each 21 metres high, sit alongside each other in the rock façade. Smaller statues of Nefertari, Rameses' chief wife, and other members of the royal family are placed between them. The inner temple was quarried 60 metres into rock and on the back wall are statues of the gods, Amun-Ra among them. Rameses adopted the example of his predecessor Amenhotep III and presented himself alongside them as a fellow god. The statues were illuminated by the sun twice a year, some sixty days each side of the Winter Solstice. Further along the escarpment was a smaller temple to Nefertari in her own right as queen. The statement these temples make today, in their reconstituted form on higher land, is as dramatic as it has ever been.

The Disintegration of the New Kingdom

To glorify his home area in the Delta, Rameses constructed an impressive new capital at Pi-Rameses, close to the earlier Avaris. Inscriptions tell how it was endowed with fishponds and granaries. Boats arrived daily with fresh supplies so that no one went hungry. Although inland, it could be reached by river channels. The openness to the north allowed foreign craftsmen to settle—an excavated workshop where chariots were made was operated by Hittites. A temple to the Syrian goddess Astarte was to be found alongside those to the traditional gods Amun, Seth, and Ra. It is possible that the Israelites were among the migrant workers attracted by the building programme here and at a neighbouring ‘store-city’ ‘Pithom’. Stories about their fate (probably not far from similar exploited migrant workers today) and their subsequent ‘release’ or return to mainland Asia probably form the basis of the biblical accounts of the Exodus. (The word ‘Israel’ is recorded only once in Egyptian inscriptions as the name of a tribe from Canaan that was destroyed in a punitive raid in the reign of Rameses’ successor Merenptah.)

It was at Pi-Rameses that Rameses had his main palace. As the king neared the thirtieth year of his reign he built a massive set of Jubilee Halls for the ceremony of *sed*, the celebration of thirty years of power. Naturally Rameses could not neglect planning for his death, and he followed the tradition of building a great royal tomb, perhaps the most opulent of them all, in the Valley of the Kings. As a more visible memorial he constructed a vast mortuary temple, the Rameseum, on the west bank of the Nile at Thebes. Its granaries alone were so huge that 3,400 families could have been fed for a year from their contents. A more tender side to this flamboyant king can be found in the beautifully decorated tomb he created for Nefertari (see below, p. 91).

The excavators at Pi-Rameses have established that the waterways were also designed to act as a protective shield and that there were at least three barracks to house soldiers. Despite the public grandeur and outward confidence of the reign there were already signs that the state was becoming more defensive. The stalemate with the Hittites must have been a shock. One small but fascinating detail is that Rameses carved the royal cartouche that bore his name very deeply in the stone as if he were afraid it would be obliterated. After the death of Rameses external pressures on Egypt grew. The Sahara continued to become drier, encouraging the raids of land-hungry nomads on the wealth of the valley. For the first time in Egyptian history Libyans from the west organized themselves into sophisticated raiding forces, outwitting the Egyptian defences. These Libyan attacks may have been in collaboration with the so-called Sea Peoples, or simply part of a Mediterranean-wide disruption of which these ‘Peoples’ were one manifestation (see p. 36 above).

Rameses’ long reign, sixty-seven years, saw him father an enormous number of children, many of whom predeceased him. His eldest surviving son, Merenptah, succeeded him successfully but there were then so many competing sons and grandsons that stability was lost. In the next dynasty, the Twentieth, only one able

king, Rameses III (c.1184–1153 BC) stands out. He carried out a series of brilliant victories against the intruders, adapting traditional strategies to fight the crowded troop ships threatening the coast. He found the energy to build some fine monuments, including a massive temple at Medinet Habu near Thebes, where his defeat of the Sea Peoples was trumpeted in a final swansong of Egyptian glory.

Nothing, however, could hide the reality, that his kingdom was crumbling. Continuous militarization was draining resources. The destruction of the Sea Peoples broke up traditional trade routes. Rameses attempted to boost his position by seeking the support of the priesthood. He made immense benefactions to the temple, above all that of Amun at Thebes. Perhaps 15 per cent of available land was made over so that eventually the temples controlled a third of all cultivable land in Egypt. This was counter-productive in that the land was lost to the crown as a source to tax. By the end of Rameses' reign there were growing signs of internal unrest with the atmosphere of insecurity heightened by the raids from Libya. An assassination attempt was hatched within the royal harem, while, in a rare bureaucratic breakdown, grain rations failed to arrive for the craftsmen working on the royal tombs. In retaliation the workmen organized the first recorded strike in history. As royal authority diminished the tombs they had built in earlier centuries were being looted and in about 1100 the workers' village at Deir el-Medina (see below p. 82) was abandoned.

The last nine kings of the Twentieth Dynasty all took the name Rameses, as if they hoped it would prove a lucky token against further decay, but they could do little to stop the decline. Part of the problem was that many were already elderly when they came to the throne. Their reigns proved too short and their energies too diminished for them to enforce their power. The average Twentieth Dynasty reign lasted under twelve years, compared to an average of nearly twenty years in the Eighteenth Dynasty. The resources available to the kings were also contracting. The gold mines of Nubia were exhausted by the end of the New Kingdom. Rich areas such as the Fayum, a cultivated part of Egypt since the Middle Kingdom, gradually became indefensible against the Libyans. As central government faltered under ageing kings with diminishing resources, the empire disintegrated. The Asian empire was lost by the time of Rameses VI (1143–1136 BC). The population of Nubia fell as gold mining ceased there and its provincial administration withdrew at the end of the Twentieth Dynasty. By 1060 Egypt had withdrawn into its original valley boundaries.

A vivid picture of the collapse of society within Egypt comes from records of tomb robberies. Such robberies had always taken place, but now their scale seems to have increased dramatically. It was the impoverished inhabitants of western Thebes who were the most prominent in siphoning off grain supplies from the temples and robbing tombs of their furniture. Even royal tombs were not immune, a sure sign that respect for authority was crumbling. A stone mason, Amun-panufer, confessed to stealing all the gems in the coffins of a king and queen from the Seventeenth Dynasty, burning the coffins and distributing all the grave goods among his accomplices. Lists of goods recovered by officials include gold and silver alongside linen,

vases of oil, wood, copper, and bronze. Corruption spread. Officials in charge of transporting grain were siphoning off supplies as they stopped along the river. Nubian troops brought up to help deal with the problem joined in despoiling tombs and monuments. In a desperate, but successful, attempt to preserve the bodies of the kings, their mummies, among them that of the great Rameses II, were collected from their original tombs and gathered in a new hiding place in the hills behind Deir el-Bahri, where they lay undiscovered until the nineteenth century.

A lament from an earlier banquet song catches the mood of the last years of the New Kingdom:

Those gods who existed aforetime, who rest in their pyramids, and the noble blessed dead likewise, the builders of the chapels; their places are no more, like those who never were. None returns from there to tell us of their condition, to tell their state, to reassure us, until we attain the place where they have gone. (Translation: R. Parkinson)

This was a devastating moment for a society that prided itself so much on its good order and respect for the past. Despite moments of national revival, the Egyptian state was never again to enjoy such power and sustained prosperity as it had in the New Kingdom.

INTERLUDE 1

The Amarna Letters

To the king, my lord, my sun, say: message from Shuwardata, your servant, the ground for your feet. At the feet of the king, my lord and my sun, seven and seven times I throw myself. The king my lord has permitted us to make war against Qiltu, and I have made war: it is saved for me, my city has been restored to me. Why ever did Abdi-Heba write to the men of Qiltu: 'Take silver and be my followers!?' Let the king my lord know that Abdi-Heba took my city from my hands. Further, Lab'aya is dead who took our cities, but here is Abdi-Heba who is a second Lab'aya, and takes our cities. May the king think of his servant regarding this fact. I will do nothing, until the king responds with a word to his servant!

(Translation: Ian Hutchesson)

In the New Kingdom, the Egyptians held a loose but persistent hold over the land of Palestine. Shuwardata was one of the vassal kings in the region, apparently ruling a small state in the south of the region. He was one of many in Palestine whose cities had been harassed by rival kings, first Lab'aya of Shechem, and then after Lab'aya's death by Abdi-Heba, ruler of Jerusalem. Yet rather than defend himself, he waits on the pharaoh before making a move.

This is the world of the Amarna letters, some 350 documents discovered in 1887 in the abandoned palace of Akhenaten at El-Amarna (and thus datable to c.1360–1335). The letters are written in Akkadian cuneiform, the lingua franca of the region, and this in itself is a sign that no one power is strong enough to insist on the use of its own language. (None of the letters, even from the vassals, is in Egyptian, for instance.) The letters record the complex and fluid relationships between the pharaohs Amenhotep III and Akhenaten and the rulers of the Ancient Near East, including both 'great powers' and vassal states of the pharaoh in Palestine. (See the map on p. 30.) So the state of Mitanni, in northern Syria between the Tigris and Euphrates, once an enemy of Egypt, is now, in the surviving letters from its king, Tushratta, an ally and the royal families have intermarried. Less stable is the relationship with the Hittites during the reign of Suppiluliuma (see p. 34 above) especially after Suppiluliuma invades Mitanni and reduces it to a vassal state. It is an instability that is eventually to lead to war between Egypt and the Hittites in the following century (see p. 35 above). The Hittites faced another challenge in the resurgent power of Assyria under king Ashur-uballit (1356–1330), who was determined to exploit the power vacuum left by the collapse of Mitanni. This resurgence

led to protests from another power, the Kassite kingdom of Babylonia, that were quelled by a marriage alliance in which Ashur-uballit's daughter married the son of the Kassite king.

The letters are always personal, between individual rulers, and so treaties had to be renegotiated on the death of one or other of the parties. As between the 'great powers' the kings show a readiness to use force but also an understanding of the fears among rival powers that such force would provoke. Rulers know when they ought to compromise. The sensitive way in which diplomacy is exercised by a rising power is well shown in the two letters in the archive to the pharaoh from Ashur-uballit. In the first he has just asserted his authority and is testing his relationship with Egypt carefully. Will he be accepted by Akhenaten as an equal?

Say to the king of Egypt: This speaks Ashur-uballit, king of Assyria. May everything be well with you, your house, your land, your chariots and your troops. I am sending a messenger to you to visit you and to visit your country. Until now my predecessors did not write; but today I am writing. I am sending you a beautiful chariot, two horses, and a date stone of authentic lapis lazuli, as your greeting gift. Do not delay the messenger whom I have sent to you for a visit. May he pay his visit and then come back to me. (Translation: A. K. Grayson)

This cautious approach makes no mention of the Assyrian king's own status and does not go so far as to ask for a gift in return as was the custom between equal kings. Yet by the time of the second letter, Ashur-uballit is confident of his position. He refers to himself by the title of 'great king' and addresses the pharaoh as his 'brother'. What is more, he feels confident enough to complain that the pharaoh did not even send him enough gold in a gift to cover the cost of sending his own messengers!

The vassal states of Palestine are in a different position. The area was fragmented between mountain ranges and gorges and no king was likely to become strong enough to become a great power. Yet this was clearly Egypt's sphere of influence and no outside power would be allowed to threaten her hegemony (hence the eventual confrontation with the Hittites at Qadesh). Egyptian rule was comparatively light, there were local Egyptian administrators, expeditionary forces, and scattered garrisons, and their main concern was to safeguard the flow of tribute. It was common for Palestinians to be brought up in the Egyptian court and then transferred as rulers of an important city in the hope that they would remain loyal. Abdi-Heba, for instance, had been educated in Egypt and placed on the throne of Jerusalem by the pharaoh. Akhenaten seems to have chosen carefully how to exercise his power. A certain amount of rivalry between kings was tolerated but there were limits to the expansion of any one vassal king. So Lab'aya had been eventually captured by the Egyptians, ostensibly to be taken back to Egypt, but killed on the way there by his captors. As Shuwardata's letter shows vassals knew it was better to ask the pharaoh first before seeking revenge!

The *realpolitik* of diplomacy was underpinned by exchanges, of sons and daughters in marriage, of gifts between kings, and by trade. Egypt had, in Nubia, a plentiful source of gold, and it was useful as this was the most prized of gifts. The

bartering of brides was a more delicate matter. The pharaohs refused to let their daughters marry foreigners but they were prepared to buy in brides for their own families. These arrived with great retinues but when Amenhotep III tried to get a second Babylonian princess for himself he was rebuked by the king of Babylon for having shut the first one up in his harem so that she had not been seen for fifteen years. Egyptian gold had to be sent north to seal the deal for the new bride.

These negotiations helped to avoid interstate anarchy. What is remarkable is how successful the Amarna system was in avoiding war. While it was usual for rulers of the great powers to proclaim their strength aggressively, each ruler seems to have accepted that this was often no more than rhetoric and any tensions could be eased by working through diplomatic conventions. There was an understanding that it was in all the states' interests to keep trade on the move. While the Amarna system was never formalized into a set of stable alliances, it worked remarkably well on an ad hoc basis and has been seen by some historians as representing the birth of international diplomacy.

(See further W. L. Moran (ed. and trans.), *The Amarna Letters*, Baltimore, 2000; Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook (eds.), *Amarna Diplomacy: The Beginnings of International Relations*, Baltimore, 2000.)

Sennedjam was a stone mason who worked on the royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings. He died in the eleventh year of the reign of Rameses II so may well have been working on the king's tomb or that of one of his family. His own tomb in the workmen's village of Deir el-Medina was found in 1886 and was undisturbed, his coffin, and those of his wife Iynefer and their children, still intact inside the subterranean burial chamber. Other less important members of the family lay buried simply in shrouds.

On the eastern wall of the burial chamber there is a fine set of scenes from farming life. Sennedjam and Iynefer are shown harvesting a full field of corn, with a flint sickle, cutting down an equally abundant crop of flax, and ploughing and sowing. In the lower register an irrigation channel runs between an orchard, whose trees, date and figs, are laden with fruit, and a garden full of flowers. Yet the lucky pair are shown labouring in their finest clothes. It soon becomes clear that they do not really have to sweat in the fields. They have a group of *shabtis*, servants, in the shape of small human figures often with their tools beside them, to aid them. The couple can spend their time at leisure, as they are shown doing in another scene, playing the board game *senet*.

These wall paintings have provided us with an idealized picture of life in ancient Egypt. This is the afterlife reached by those who have survived the judgement of Osiris and all is harmony and fruitfulness. How different this must have been from the reality of everyday life in Egypt when the floods could never be assured and the ordinary labourers were subject to every kind of misfortune. We seldom hear their voices but there are rare examples where student scribes are warned of the terrible consequences of falling below the standards required, here in the text *The Satire of Trades*:

Remember the state of the peasant farmer faced with registry of the harvest-tax, when the snake has taken one half of the crop and the hippo has devoured the other half. The mice overrun the field, the locust descends and the cattle eat up. The sparrows bring poverty upon the farmer. What is left on the threshing floor falls to the thieves... The tax-official has landed on the river bank to register the harvest tax, with his janitors carrying staves and the Nubians palm rods. They say 'Give up the grain'... although there is none. They beat him up... he is thrown head first down a well... So the grain disappears. (Translation: K. Kitchen)

Sennedjam's afterlife might have been idealized but his actual life was better than most in Egypt. He had a skill and a guaranteed supply of food. His village, at Deir

el-Medina, is one of the most fully excavated sites in Egypt and provides a vivid picture of life in the New Kingdom for the successful craftsman.

The Villagers of Deir el-Medina

The village of Deir el-Medina lay close to the Valley of the Kings at Thebes and was believed by its inhabitants to have been founded by Amenhotep I of the New Kingdom (and so in about 1500 BC). For 400 years the village contained a skilled workforce, numbering about 70 craftsmen with their families and supporting staff. Deir el-Medina was an artificial settlement and not at all typical of those lived in by the mass of the farming peasantry. The villagers were guaranteed provisions whatever the state of the harvest. Its inhabitants were literate, as they had to be in order to inscribe tombs. This has proved a boon for the excavators. Papyrus itself was cheap—a roll cost about the same as a pair of sandals—so it was possible for texts to circulate widely among those who could read and some rolls are beginners' copies of older texts. As a result Deir el-Medina provides the richest record of how ordinary Egyptians lived and thought. The most extensive excavations of the site were those carried out by the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology between the 1920s and 1951.

The sole purpose of the village was the tunnelling and decoration of the royal tombs in the barren Valley of the Kings. At the start of each new reign, the required tomb would be plotted and work would begin cutting through the rock, plastering the inner chambers and then painting them. The tomb furniture would have to be made. The queens would be given their own, less opulent tombs, in a separate valley. Once a royal death had taken place there would be a rush to get everything in order for the burial just seventy days later and then work would have to begin on the successor's tomb.

As the workers were given access to the secrets and treasures of the tombs, they were cut off from the rest of Egyptian society, isolated within walls at night when they were not away working in the valley. The village relied on being provisioned from the outside with grain from the stores of the local temples and water brought up on the backs of donkeys by its own water-carriers. Marriages took place within the community and skills were passed on within families from one generation to the next. Families were not large, in one 'census' only one household is recorded as having as many as five members and there are several men living on their own. Older children seemed to have moved out of their parents' house, left the village, or set up their own homes. The earliest cemetery, to the east of the settlement, showed that even the smallest child was given a formal burial in an 'infants' section' with another plot reserved for adolescents.

Among the workmen at Deir el-Medina were painters, plasterers, woodcarvers, sculptors, masons, and scribes as well as unskilled labourers. The village had its own police force and a 'domestic staff' of launderers, slave women to mill flour, doorkeepers, and messengers. Its houses, which opened on to the main street of the village, were built on a common pattern. There were three or four main rooms one

behind the other. The first appears to have served as a household shrine, then there was a main living-room, often with columns and a skylight, a sleeping area, and an open kitchen at the back. A cellar would hold the family treasures (the master of the house often placed his bed over its entrance) while the roof was also used as space for living or sleeping. The walls had niches for the household gods. Bes, the dwarf god, the protector of families and women in childbirth, was usually the most prominent, but Taweret, the goddess of pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding, represented as a pregnant hippopotamus, and Hathor, guardian of womenfolk and domestic bliss, were also common. There was a temple to Hathor just outside the village. (Hathor, the daughter of Ra, combined several attributes in her personality—the tenderness of a mother caring for her children and the fury of a lioness protecting them, as well as, in a sensuous human form, female sexuality.) Furnishings were well crafted but simple—low stools, wooden bed-frames, pottery, with mats and baskets of woven rush.

The workmen were given one day free in every ten. Later in the New Kingdom this seems to have been increased to two. These ‘weekends’ could be used for the workmen’s own craft and building work. Many had their own sets of tools. They decorated their houses and often left their names on the doorposts. In the later dynasties a new cemetery grew up on a hillside to the west of the village. It was carefully planned. The tombs of the ordinary workmen were grouped around that of their Chief Workman (there were usually two teams, one working on each side of a tomb) and aligned with the royal tomb they had been building in the valley beyond. The burial chambers were quarried into the hillside or under the ground and whole families shared the tomb, although only the prominent members had their own coffins. Chapels of mudbrick, painted white and often surmounted by a small pyramid, stood outside each entrance.

The jottings on the potsherds cover every aspect of daily life, letters, records of work done, accounts of disputes, snatches of hymns or literature, and magic spells against illness. They give a lively picture of life in the village, wives walking out on husbands, celebrations on the feast days of the gods or favoured kings, workmen being stung by scorpions, heavy drinking on birthdays, the mourning of a lost friend. Inevitably there were tensions and disputes (and instances when tomb goods were stolen) and these were resolved by a village council. When matters appeared deadlocked there was a ritual in which a statue of the founder, the deified pharaoh Amenhotep, was carried in procession through the village by the village elders. This ritual seems to have concentrated minds and a verdict was eventually produced which was written down by a scribe and signed by the elders. Punishments could, however, be harsh, a hundred blows with a stick, branding, or hard labour. In the Nineteenth Dynasty one Peneb was sent off to the desert mines after being accused of taking on workers for his own projects and sleeping around with the wives of the village. Yet, if anything went wrong, the rations on which the village was dependent failed to come through, for instance, the villagers sank their differences in a united hostility to the outside world. (An excellent introduction to Deir el-Medina is A. G. MacDowell, *Village Life in Ancient Egypt: Laundry Lists and Love Songs*, Oxford, 2001.)

Survival Skills

The villagers at Deir el-Medina were provided with all their basic needs but they had time and resources for some free enterprise. They must have helped each other construct their own tombs, bartered surplus goods, and accumulated some extra income, or at least a store of saved crops. Owners of donkeys hired them out to the local water-carriers. Earlier sources give us further details of economic life in Egypt. The letters of Heqanakhte, a farmer from the Eleventh Dynasty, to his family date from 1950 BC. Heqanakhte did not own his land but had some accumulated 'capital' of grain, copper, oil, and flax that he could use for barter or to pay his rent in advance. He had a second income from his position as *ka-servant*, responsible for keeping an eye on the tomb of one Ipi, the vizier of Mentuhotep II. Now he is getting on in years and has become querulous. Although he has delegated his affairs to his sons he is not ready to give up control. He berates one of the sons, Merisu, for his slackness: 'Put your back into the ploughing, do your utmost, look after my seed corn, look after all my property. See, I consider you responsible for it! . . . Hoe all my land, sieve with the sieve, hack with your noses into the work.' He complains that Merisu had sent him dried-out old barley instead of the season's new crop and that he does not treat the youngest son, Sneferu, his father's favourite, with enough care. Sneferu is to be sent home to his father as soon as the ploughing is complete. He is equally annoyed by his sons' failure to respect his new young wife, Iutenheb, whom they have abused. (For the life of Heqanakhte and other 'ordinary' Egyptians, see John Ray, *Reflections of Osiris: Lives from Ancient Egypt*, London, 2001.)

There must have been other opportunities for trading activities. Pictures survive of traders sitting by the dockside selling goods that have come off moored boats. A record of the range of goods involved in what appears to be a bill of lading of a Nile riverboat from about 1137 BC includes jars of sesame oil and wine, olives, gourds, salt, gutted fish (no less than 5,000 of them) and the heads of gutted waterfowl, 110 bundles of sedge, and fifty papyrus rolls. It confirms the picture given by the Uluburun shipwreck in which trade involves many small quantities of different commodities. Much of this informal trade was carried out by the *shuty*. The *shuty* were primarily in the employ of the state or a temple but ready to use the opportunity to accumulate spare goods which they could then sell on the side. Records of grave robberies in the late New Kingdom suggest it was the *shuty* who were the most likely middlemen for the stolen goods.

The system of exchange for surplus goods was based on a unit of weight, the *deben* of about 90 grams. A *deben* could be calculated in gold, silver, or copper, with the value the greater the more precious the metal. A *deben* in silver, for instance, was worth about a hundred times one in copper. A transaction by a scribe, Penanouqit, has survived. Penanouqit wanted to sell an ox that was valued, in copper, at 130 *deben*. In return he accumulated a linen tunic valued at 60 *deben*, two others worth 10 *deben* each, 30 *deben* worth of beads for a necklace, and the remaining

20 *deben* in grain. The Egyptians never developed any exchange system involving coins (which first appear in the country about 400 BC).

As mathematicians the Egyptians were pragmatic and focused on the solution of specific administrative and architectural problems. Arithmetic and geometry, which were not distinguished, were used to add up wages, to calculate the volumes of granaries and the areas of fields (particularly important when the floods went down and the land had to be marked out again), to collect taxes, and to calculate the number of bricks needed for a planned building. The basic procedures appear to have been in place as early as 3500 BC and remained essentially undeveloped until the arrival of the Greeks more than 3,000 years later. The two major mathematical texts, the Moscow and Rhind papyri (the latter now in the British Museum), are essentially lists of problems and their solutions that a scribe would have consulted when he needed to. A typical problem was how to share out a fixed number of loaves of bread or jugs of beer between people of different status, some of whom had the right to more than others. The Egyptians were hampered by their inability in general to use fractions with a numerator higher than one, so that if they wanted to record $\frac{7}{8}$, for instance, they had to build it up as $\frac{1}{2}$ plus $\frac{1}{4}$ plus $\frac{1}{8}$, while $\frac{9}{7}$ becomes $\frac{1}{2}$ plus $\frac{1}{4}$ plus $\frac{1}{4}$ plus $\frac{1}{28}$. Quick calculations were only possible through the use of prepared tables.

There was more success with geometry. The Egyptians knew that triangles in the ratio 3:4:5 had a right-angle opposite the hypotenuse and they appear to have used ropes with these proportions marked by knots when they wanted to create a right angle. They could calculate the areas of triangles, and in the measurement of circles calculated pi to the decimal equivalent of 3.16 remarkably close to the actual figure of 3.1416. They could also work out the angles of pyramids. Measurements were in the 'royal cubit', about the same length as a man's forearm, a picture of which was used for the hieroglyph for cubit. An area of 100 royal cubits, known as a *setjat*, was used as a measure of land.

The rigid adherence to using numbers only for practical issues meant that the Egyptians never developed any conception of mathematics as a science. The historian of mathematics Morris Kline sums up their limitations: 'There was almost no symbolism, hardly any conscious thought about abstraction, no formulation of general methodology, and no concept of proof or even plausible argument that might convince one of the correctness of a procedure or formula.' This sober assessment needs to be remembered when the Egyptians are portrayed as possessing some kind of higher wisdom. In many ways their intellectual skills remained rudimentary even if in other respects they were sophisticated survivors.

Home and Family

There were many incentives for accumulating wealth not least in providing for the immediate needs of a family. The family was the living unit of Egyptian society. Wall paintings and sculptures show contented couples with their arms around each

other. Moving love lyrics from the last years of the New Kingdom suggest that there may have been some emotional equality between the sexes. 'I yearn for your love by day and night,' pleads one girl. 'I lie awake for long hours until dawn. Your form revives my heart. My desire is entirely for you. Your voice it is which gives my body vigour.' A young man remembers how he has braved a lurking crocodile to cross the river in flood to reach his beloved, while a girl lures her lover to the water's edge with the promise that she will let him see her undress and bathe. There was also an ideal of care of young for old. 'Repay your mother for all her care to you,' writes one scribe. 'Give her as much bread as she needs and carry her as she has carried you... For three years she suckled you, nor did she shrink from your dirt.' The evidence from Deir el-Medina suggests, however, that things did not always run smoothly in family life. Infidelity and jealousy were as common in ancient Egypt as elsewhere.

Marriage took place for women at the onset of puberty, between 12 and 14, while men seem to have been older, perhaps 20, with those in the administrative elite having already begun to earn a living by then. It seems that both families had to provide goods before a marriage contract could be made, another incentive for gathering wealth. Within the royal family it was possible for a brother to marry a sister. (The legend of Isis and Osiris legitimized, or was developed to legitimize, the practice.) For commoners brother-sister marriages were almost unheard of, although marriages between cousins and uncles and nieces were quite common.

Women normally followed what would now be seen as a highly traditional pattern of life, running the household and being expected to produce a male heir to carry on the family and to take responsibility for the family tomb. It was wives who, either personally or through servants, ground corn, baked bread, spun flax, and wove cloth from it. The job was not without its status and there was some acceptance of women's rights. Men were specifically warned to leave the running of the house to their wives, and women did have the right to own and manage property and could bring a case in court if they were dispossessed of it. A woman who was divorced by her husband became entitled to his continued support.

In wall paintings women are usually portrayed as much lighter-skinned than their husbands. This may partly be convention but also presumably reflects the longer hours they spent within the home. (Light skin, a sign that a woman did not have to work in the sun, suggested high status.) Women are shown helping their husbands in the fields (as in Sennedjam's tomb), and an inscription from the late New Kingdom suggests they could travel around freely outside the home. However, there are very few examples of women earning a living independently. There were some openings in the temples as junior priestesses or leaders of choruses but a more likely role was as an entertainer at feasts or as a member of the royal harem. (The kings had elaborate harems and one portrayal of Rameses III shows him relaxing in one.) Egypt might well be compared with Mediterranean society where, even if women do not appear to be dominant in public life, they exercise considerable influence behind the scenes.

It was not expensive to keep children. They could run around naked in the warm air and live on papyrus roots. However, the mortality rate was high, especially at the moment of weaning. When boys reached the age of 14 they passed into adult life after a religious ceremony that included circumcision. On one occasion, in the First Intermediate Period, 120 boys are recorded as being circumcised at the same time, an indication that this was an important rite of passage recognized by the whole community. Girls stayed at home, and seem to have had no equivalent ceremony other than that of marriage.

By the age of 14 boys would already have received some training in their father's occupation, either through learning on the job or through formal instruction in a temple school. (Some records suggest formal education may have begun as early as 5.) For future administrators the course was a demanding one and total commitment was expected. 'I am told you neglect your studies and think only of pleasure. You wander through the streets, stinking of beer and have been found performing acrobatics on a wall,' was the poor report given by a scribe to one of his students. It may have taken twelve years to master all the skills required to be a scribe. (The skills demanded went far beyond learning to write. Among other things a scribe would be expected to master all the details of administration, what rations a soldier should be given, how many bricks were needed to build a ramp, and how many men to pull and erect a stone statue.)

Another important use of wealth was the construction of a home. At Akhenaten's capital at Tell el-Amarna the homes of the administrators were much larger than those at Deir el-Medina. They were built within a surrounding rectangular enclosure that left space for an open courtyard and a side chapel. The main rooms were decorated with painted plasters. In one house there was a ceiling of brilliant blue, columns of reddish brown, and walls predominantly in white but with a frieze of blue lotus leaves on a green background. Among the comforts enjoyed by the owners were bathrooms, in which the bather stood on a limestone slab and had water poured over him, and shaped stone lavatory seats. There was ample storage space for grain next to a kitchen court at the back of the house. Some wall paintings show houses with ponds and gardens well stocked with a variety of trees. The family could grow its own vegetables. Onions and leeks were particular favourites while the most popular fruits were grapes, figs, and dates. One study of seeds from a Middle Kingdom site discovered poppies, lupins, mignonette, jasmine, heliotrope, and irises among the flowers and peas, beans, radishes, and cucumbers among the vegetables. Among the contributions of the Hyksos era to Egyptian diet were apples and olives.

Such elite homes and their accompanying lifestyle required a mass of domestic help. When a wealthy man went out on business he might be accompanied by two servants. One carried a mat and a fly-whisk, the other a pair of his sandals. His destination reached, the master would have his feet washed, his fresh sandals put on, and then he would settle down on his mat with the flies being flicked from him. Within the home, cooking, cleaning, and waiting at table would be done by servants or by slaves captured in military campaigns.

Social life for the elite was sophisticated. Their homes were furnished elegantly, the furniture carved with animal heads or inlaid with ivory, ebony, or glass. Every care was taken with personal appearance. A box belonging to one Tutu, who lived at the time of the Eighteenth Dynasty, the height of the New Kingdom, was filled with her cosmetics, eye paint, a mixing palette, an ivory comb, and pink leather sandals. Banquets were an important feature of this lifestyle and they were conducted according to elaborate rituals. The host stood at his gate and was greeted formally by his guests as they arrived. He responded in kind and then led them indoors where both sexes settled down for the meal. Music was an essential part of any feast. Dancing girls would perform to the sound of harps, lutes, oboes, or flutes.

Egyptian Medicine

Life in ancient Egypt was, typically, short, certainly shorter than in most parts of the world today. A large number of embalmed bodies have now been examined, alongside the skeletons of those not rich enough to afford the process. There was a peak in death rates at about the age of 3 when children transferred from breast milk with its protective powers to solid food. The average life expectancy for those who survived childhood is calculated at 29 with few individuals surviving beyond 60. Life expectancy was longer for the elite, but one survey of 26 royal mummies suggested that only three of them lived beyond 50. Many Egyptians were afflicted with parasites, acquired probably from polluted water sources, while lungs suffered from sand and coal dust (probably inhaled from the smoke of fires). Tuberculosis was also widespread. Teeth were worn down, probably by the silicone from the stones used for the threshing or grinding, and gum abscesses were common. The analysis of bones also suggests painful and debilitating handicaps. Many individuals who survived to 40 had spinal osteophytosis, excrescences on the spine caused by excessive strain. Such lesions are missing from the richer burials, although many of these show signs of arteriosclerosis, originating from a diet rich in fat. Cancer was rare, probably because few Egyptians reached the ages at which it becomes common. (See John Nunn, *Ancient Egyptian Medicine*, London, 1997.)

Homer wrote in the *Odyssey* that medicine in Egypt was more developed than anywhere in the world, and Herodotus, writing some three centuries later, agreed with him. The Egyptian physicians certainly had some expertise, fostered by the practice of specialization and the meticulous examination of disorders. In one papyrus different kinds of snakebites are described in tiny detail each with a prognosis. 'As for the cobra serpent, with the hue of sand, if it bites a man he suffers on the side that was not pierced and does not suffer on the side with the bite; it is an illness I can treat'—apparently with emetics and bleedings. The Ebers papyrus has some 700 prescriptions for internal diseases set out according to the organ affected. The Edwin Smith surgical papyrus shows a profound empirical knowledge of different kinds of injuries with recommendations for treatment. It contains the earliest known description of a brain. If a skull is smashed open in an accident, you find an

organ 'like the corrugations which appear on molten copper in the crucible, and something therein throbs and flutters under your fingers like the weak place in the crown of the head of a child when it has not become whole'. Other texts concentrate on dislocated joints. Egyptian physicians seem to have been able to mend broken bones and treat open wounds, while there are skeletons whose trepanned skulls have healed over, suggesting that the recipients of surgery sometimes survived.

However, effective treatment was hindered because there was no proper understanding of how the human body worked, despite the close examination the practice of embalming allowed. The heart was considered the centre of the body, and from it flowed all bodily fluids, not only blood but saliva, urine, and semen. It was believed that all internal illnesses were caused by obstructions of their flow, often due to the malevolence of a god. Successful freeing of these obstructions relied on complicated techniques and potions, most of which would have had no effect whatsoever on any illness. Nile mud, dirt from a patient's fingernails, and mouse droppings were used alongside a variety of herbs and extracts from animals. Recovery from most illnesses would only have been through natural healing or chance fitting of a particular remedy to the right disease (the application of mouldy bread, an anticipation of penicillin, for instance).

In short, Egyptian medicine operated in a context in which empirical approaches (sometimes, as with the effects of snakebites, accurate, sometimes as with the internal workings of the body, hopelessly misguided) mixed with what could be called magic. No treatment could be effective without reciting an incantation over the patient and this may have acted as a placebo in that the very act of consulting a doctor can help towards healing. What might appear to be an irrational precept, that a medicinal plant must be gathered before daybreak as some texts required, for instance, is shown to be 'rational' in that alkaloids such as morphine vary in strength in particular parts of a plant during the daily cycle. However, there was little incentive to reach a deeper understanding of the body. Texts often achieved a sacred quality in themselves and were passed on from generation to generation without questioning. The Edwin Smith papyrus dates from the Second Intermediate (Hyksos) Period but has material that is a thousand years older. The older a treatment the more respect it was given. The Greek historian Diodorus, who visited Egypt in the first century BC, wrote that the doctor who followed a text exactly would not be blamed if the patient died, but if he disregarded it and the patient suffered he could even be sentenced to death.

The Rituals of Death

Among the songs that have survived from these banquets are laments on the shortness of men's lives and the inevitability of death. The subject was an appropriate one. The serenity and sophistication of life for the richer classes cannot conceal the fact that death was often sudden. Texts survive from the beginning of the first millennium in which the gods are petitioned to protect a child against the dangers of

everyday life, which are spelt out in detail. There is the threat of disease, of course, but also walls that fall on one, scorpion and snakebites, drowning, or being eaten by crocodiles. Among those who can bring harm are Syrians, Nubians, and western nomads, and there was a fear of being spoken to in foreign languages, presumably because evil words could be passed on without the Egyptian listener recognizing them. Then there are more mysterious powers to guard against—gods who can seize people in the countryside and kill them in the town and a general fear that *heka*, a creative power which can be used for good or ill, will be turned against a child. These texts need to be set within the growing sense of personal piety found in the New Kingdom after the disruption brought by Akhenaten. It is ultimately the gods, not a strong pharaoh, who will protect and so they must be petitioned to do so. There is a rise in the use of oracles in an attempt to find out the will of the gods.

The awareness of the inevitability of death can be seen in the custom of planning one's own tomb from about the age of 20. In the New Kingdom, as has already been mentioned, these tombs consisted of a court in front of the rock face (in the hills west of Thebes, for instance), a series of chambers, halls, and chapels cut into the rock where offerings could be left, and then a descending tunnel to the underground chambers where the body was to rest. This was sealed with warning texts in the hope it would remain undisturbed. As in earlier periods, the tomb contained a stele, a gravestone, with the name and exploits of the deceased on it.

The rituals that led to the reception of the deceased into the realm of Osiris were formalized in the *Book of Going Forth by Day* (usually known as *The Book of the Dead* and first found in the Middle Kingdom), a copy of which was left in the tomb. The finest of these, such as the papyrus of Ani, a scribe and accountant from the reign of Rameses II, now in the British Museum, contain both the spells and prayers and illustrations of the stages towards the judgement. The deceased pleads to be accepted. 'Here I am in your presence, O Lord of the West. There is no wrongdoing in my body, I have not wittingly told lies, there has been no second fault. Grant that I may be like the favoured ones who are in your suite, O Osiris, one greatly favoured by the good god, one loved of the Lord of the Two Lands, vindicated before Osiris' (Spell 30 from *The Book of the Dead*). There were forty-two judges before whom the deceased had to plead his or her case. High standards were expected and covered every area of moral behaviour. He had to prove he had not killed or stolen, committed adultery, or had sex with a boy. He must never have insulted the king, trespassed, damaged a grain measure, or harmed his neighbours' land. At the end of the trial the heart of the dead man, the seat of the emotions and the intellect, was weighed against a feather by the jackal-god Anubis. If it was too heavily weighed by sin and the scale tilted downwards the heart was devoured by a monstrous animal. If not, the way was open to the Field of Reeds, the lush fertile land somewhere beyond the western horizon. (See Raymond Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, London, 2010.)

The tombs were also decorated with the rituals of transformation from the life of the real world into that of the next. Perhaps the finest set of wall paintings come

from the tomb of Nefertari, the chief queen of Rameses II, which was discovered at Thebes in the Valley of the Queens by the Italian archaeologist Ernesto Schiaparelli in 1904. The tomb is treated as the dwelling place of the gods, presided over by Osiris, and the paintings show the welcome of Nefertari. In one of the ante-chambers she, in her turn, makes him a magnificent offering of meat, bread, and vegetables. A staircase descends to the inner chamber and here Nefertari has to show that she has mastered the spells that will see her through each of the doors that will lead to the realm of Osiris. In the paintings around the depression in which the coffin was laid, Osiris is shown in his different manifestations and a text promises that Nefertari will always inhabit his sacred land. Other gods and goddesses, Isis, Hathor, and the jackal-god Anubis, offer their protection to the queen. (For an illustrated guide to the tomb, see John MacDonald, *House of Eternity: The Tomb of Nefertari*, London and New York, 1996.)

None of this transformation would have been possible without a preserved body—in fact, there could be no more devastating fate for the soul than for the body not to be recoverable after death. The skills of the embalmers reached their peak in the New Kingdom. Soon after death the brain and internal organs of the body were removed, although the heart, as the core of the body, was left in place. All were packed with dry natron, a mineral obtained from deposits west of the Delta, which absorbed the fluids. The body was left to dry out for forty days and then was repacked with linen or sawdust so that its shape was retained. The other organs, including the natron now impregnated with body fluids, were packed separately, the organs in so-called Canopic jars, which were placed under the protection of four sons of Horus. The body was then bound in cloth. This was an important ritual in itself, taking as many as fifteen days. The head had a funerary mask, in the case of a king in gold, placed over it. The hope was that this would allow the body to be recognized by the *ka*, the spirit, on the occasions it returned to the tomb.

The completed mummy (the word comes from the Arabic word for bitumen, *mummiya*, a substance not in fact used for embalming until much later) would then be placed in a coffin. In the case of a royal burial there would be three coffins, the first of gold, the other two of gilded and inlaid wood. The whole would be secured in a stone sarcophagus. The coffins of New Kingdom commoners tended to be only of wood. All coffins were decorated with ritual texts. Common too were a pair of eyes, on one side of the box, supposedly to allow the occupant to see the sun rising in the east. The whole process from death to completion of the mummy was prescribed to take place within seventy days. If the death was sudden this was the only time the workmen had to finish off the tomb. In some there are clear signs of the building having been finished in haste to meet the deadline. The sarcophagus was sealed at the base of the burial shaft.

The tomb would also be stocked with the possessions a man might need in the next life. The wealthy elite took no chances and provided themselves with tables, beds, chairs, even chariots and boats. In the tomb of Tutankhamun, the only royal tomb to have been found largely intact, there was a throne of gilded wood, clothes, writing palettes, gaming boards, fans, and jewellery in addition to his sarcophagus

and full set of three coffins with the gold mask which covered his head. There was an obsessive fear that the deceased might demean his status by having to engage in physical labour. By the last years of the New Kingdom it had become usual to provide 365 *shabtis*, one for each day of the year, together with thirty-six supervisors. They were made in pottery, glass, or metal and could even be provided with their own equipment—hoes, baskets for grain, or water-pots on yokes.

There is no more lasting reminder of the underlying prosperity of ancient Egypt than its capacity to divert so much of its wealth into closed tombs. The art of balancing the needs of the living with those perceived ones of the dead is a fine testimony to the stability and sophistication of the state. Life in ancient Egypt had as many tensions and fears as in any other society but the Egyptians had evolved ways of coping with insecurity and accepting the realities of life. One must live within one's limits. As *The Instruction of Ptah-hotep*, an early text revived in the late New Kingdom, puts it: 'Have no confidence that you are a learned man. Take counsel with the ignorant as with the wise, for the limits of excellence cannot be reached and no artist fully possesses his skill.' This is perhaps where Egyptian wisdom was to be found.

The Neo-Assyrian Empire

I felled 3,000 of their fighting men with the sword. I carried off prisoners, possessions, oxen and cattle from them. I burnt many captives from them. I captured many troops alive, I cut off some of their hands and arms; I cut off of others their noses, ears and extremities. I gouged out the eyes of many troops. I made one pile of the living and one of heads. I hung their heads on trees around the city. I burnt their adolescent boys and girls. I razed, destroyed, burnt and consumed the city.

(Quoted in J. Oates, *Babylon*.)

As this quotation, from the Royal Annals that survive from the years 910 to 649 BC, shows, a strategy of terror and annihilation was embedded in Assyrian military culture. Despite the turmoil of Near Eastern politics the Assyrians had survived as a kingdom and their royal family was still able to trace its lineage back to the sixteenth century. This gave the kingdom a bedrock of legitimacy that underlay periods of dynamic revival in the later centuries of the second millennium BC—the so-called Middle Assyrian period (c.1400–c.1050). The myth of an extensive Assyrian state persisted throughout Assyrian history so that, even when out conquering others, kings insisted that they were simply reasserting their right to their own territory. This was a militaristic society, continually finding ‘enemies’, even when these were often nomadic tribes of little consequence.

A new phase of expansion for Assyria began in the ninth century when wars were launched by the kings, notably Adad-Nirari II, Ashurnasirpal II, and Shalmaneser III. The Assyrian state god, Assur, now proclaimed the right of the state under its king, his representative on earth, to expand its borders without limit. So there are campaigns to the west to Syria, the Levant, and southern Anatolia, and into the foothills of the Zagros mountains in the east. Ashurnasirpal reached the Mediterranean, which he called ‘the Great Sea’, and in the flush of his victories he initiated an artistic revolution. In the great new palace he constructed for himself at Kalhu north of Assur (the modern Nimrud), he covered the walls with a mass of finely carved reliefs. Comparison of designs suggests that the inspiration came from the wealthy state of Carchemish that had offered him tribute. Subsequent Assyrian palaces at Khorsabad (the modern Dur-Sharrukin), and Nineveh follow the tradition. At Nineveh, Austen Layard, the nineteenth-century excavator of the palace, found over three kilometres of reliefs in the seventy-one halls of the palace. (After a somewhat unseemly struggle for control of the site with rival French

excavators many of the reliefs were hurriedly shipped off to London, where they remain among the treasures of the British Museum. The French appropriated the reliefs from the palace at Khorsabad and most are now in the Louvre.) Many scenes show cities being stormed (the Assyrians were masters of siege warfare, their expertise not equalled until Hellenistic times) and then plundered without mercy, but the kings also show off their prowess as builders and hunters of lions. While the reliefs are blatant propaganda, they also provide an unrivalled picture of everyday life in town and country.

By 1000, iron was superseding bronze as the metal of war (it was much harder, see further p. 129), but the real strength of the Assyrians lay in their cavalry, made up of faster and heavier horses bred and pastured on the rich grazing lands of the plain. By the end of the ninth century, the whole of northern Mesopotamia was under Assyrian control and Babylon, whose independence had at first been respected, had been devastated. The Assyrians prospered from the weakness of their enemies. There were moments as in 853 when a coalition of forces under the control of the Syrians matched the Assyrian armies of king Shalmaneser and forced him back, but the coalition soon fell apart and Shalmaneser was able to regain the initiative for the Assyrians.

In the first half of the eighth century BC, however, the empire faltered and the state withdrew into its traditional territories. It took one of the great Assyrian kings, Tiglath-pilaser III (744–727), to reform the Assyrian army so that it was maintained as a standing professional force of foot soldiers backed by mounted forces, chariots, and cavalry. The old custom of waiting until the crops were in and the mountain passes clear of snow before campaigning began was abandoned. The new army had an immense advantage over its rivals whose troops were reassembled year by year and the result was a transition from a state that had successfully held its original territory to one that was self-consciously an empire ruling over subject peoples. At its height the empire extended north into southern Anatolia, west to the coasts of the Mediterranean, eastwards into modern Iran, and even raided south into Egypt (see below, p. 103). There were varying methods of control; those who submitted easily were left as vassal states, those who showed signs of continued resistance were incorporated as directly ruled provinces, often with their populations deported. Such was the fate of the Israelites of whom 27,290 were recorded as being sent off to north-eastern Syria in the reign of Sargon II (721–705). (The miserable lines of deportees, their possessions on carts and the women carrying their children, are recorded on the palace reliefs.) Other states, notably Babylon, proved harder to control and there were pragmatic attempts to find a way of bringing Babylonia under Assyrian influence without goading it into revolt. Even so Babylon was sacked on occasion.

The Assyrian declarations of war were presented within a standard formula that suggested that the kings had done everything to avoid battle but the intransigence of their opponents had roused the anger of the god Ashur. It was the sacred duty of the king to intervene to preserve the harmony of all. After the horror of suppression, a myth was promulgated that the gods of the conquered peoples had abandoned

them because of their behaviour, even that these gods had called on the Assyrians to wreak their vengeance. So during a siege of Jerusalem (in 701), the Judaeen court was told by the Assyrian commander that it was quite clear that they had offended Yahweh and that he had abandoned them to their fate. However, the Assyrians would return the gods (literally, it seems, in that cult statues would be removed from a city after its defeat and then returned) and natural harmony would be restored. Moreover the treaties between the Assyrian kings and subject rulers were upheld by oaths in which both the Assyrian and the local gods were evoked. If the treaty was broken it was treated as an act of madness—no sane person would risk the anger of the gods. Again it would be the duty of the king to restore their favour by destroying the rebels.

Even so, the empire would not have survived as long as it did if suppression had been its only strategy. The kings portrayed themselves as fathers of their people who cared for the well-being of all and it is known that they would listen to appeals. Plunder was brought back to the Assyrian heartland and distributed freely. A letter to the king Ashurbanipal (668–627), the last of the great Assyrian rulers, describes the prosperity that was the result. ‘The old men dance, the young men sing, the women and girls are happy; women are married, adorned with earrings, boys and girls are brought forth, the births thrive... Those who were sick for many years have got well, the hungry have been sated, the parched have been anointed with oil, the needy have been covered with garments.’ The Assyrians had a deliberate policy of agricultural expansion, the bringing into cultivation of new areas, and a state-sponsored distribution of iron ploughs to the peasantry. This was enforced, however, by the deliberate policy of settling deportees in depopulated parts of the empire. In their new homes the deportees were often described as Assyrians as if their original nationality had been erased. The empire also seems to have been given coherence by the shared values of its ruling elite in the same way as is found in the Roman empire a few centuries later. Favoured courtiers are found holding land throughout the empire, a guarantee of shared involvement in its security.

In the final century of the empire a new capital was created at Nineveh (the modern Mosul), hitherto a fairly minor religious centre. The king responsible was Sennacherib (705–681), who was determined that the city would not only be impressive (it was to hold ‘a palace without rival’, an ambitious enterprise in a region known for its magnificent royal buildings) but would also enjoy the latest technology. Its hydraulic engineering works were so sophisticated that some of its tunnels and dams are still in use today. They watered orchards and parks and then extended out to the arable land around. (It may be that the famous hanging gardens of Babylon were in fact at Nineveh, as convincingly argued by Stephanie Dalley, *The Mystery of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon*, Oxford, 2013.) Meanwhile a mass of deported workmen laboured on the palace and the squares and avenues of the city. While Sennacherib could be as brutal as his predecessors—he diverted his considerable technical skills to work out a means of flooding Babylon after he had sacked

it—he was clearly something more than this. The reliefs at Nineveh show his informed interest in the vast territories he controlled.

His successor but one, Ashurbanipal, went further in proclaiming himself as a scholar. ‘I can solve the most complicated divisions and multiplications,’ he boasted. ‘I have read intricate tablets inscribed with obscure Sumerian and Akkadian, difficult to unravel, and examined sealed and obscure inscriptions on stone from before the flood.’ He is remembered as the founder of one of the first libraries in a form recognizable today, a systematically arranged set of books available for consultation. (See Lionel Casson, *Libraries in the Ancient World*, New Haven and London, 2002.) The tablets in Ashurbanipal’s library recorded their provenance, often as ‘Palace of Ashurbanipal, King of the World, King of Assyria’. Many of the tablets were accumulated as trophies of war from defeated cities, a precedent to be followed by the Romans after they defeated Greek states and took off their libraries as plunder. The collection seems to have been personal to the king but texts warning against theft suggest it was also open to other readers. There may have been some 1,500 titles in all, omens and religious texts, scholarly works, even dictionaries for translating Sumerian into Akkadian, and classics of literature such as the ubiquitous *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Omens predominate, warnings that, if a set procedure is not followed or particular events occur, then there might be specific consequences if the gods are not persuaded to change the result. There is particular care taken to ensure correct copying of texts, probably because many contained ritual formulas that had to be accurate to be effective. The perennial problems of librarians are recorded in other tablets from the period in which readers are warned against breaking tablets, placing them in water, or rubbing out the text, and the most time-honoured problem of all, not returning them! (It was the decipherment of one of the tablets from this library by George Smith in 1872 that opened up a new era of biblical scholarship when Smith unravelled an account of the Great Flood.)

In a few short years at the end of the seventh century (640–610) the Assyrian empire succumbed to the combined forces of the Medes and Babylonians and as an empire disappeared suddenly and completely from the historical record. Ashur was sacked in 614, Nineveh fell in 612. Why the Assyrian collapse was so sudden is not clear. As with Egypt in the reigns of Pepy and Rameses II, there had been a long-lived king (Ashurbanipal, 668–627) whose vitality may have eroded with time. On Ashurbanipal’s death there were power struggles between rival claimants and these may have caused some weakening of the state in the 620s. Babylon asserted its independence in this decade and then, under its king Nabopolassar, went on the offensive, but relationships between the two had always been unsettled and this is hardly enough to explain the defeat of an empire which had developed such sophisticated survival skills. What seems to have tipped the balance against Assyria is the intervention of the Medes. It is possible that Assyria’s weakening grip on eastern trade routes threatened to undermine the prosperity of the Medes who took retaliatory action. The combination of two enemies proved too much. The records suggest the shock waves of the collapse were felt throughout the Near East. The Greek historian Herodotus (see below, p. 207) records the fall of Nineveh in his history of

the Persian wars (as part of the rise of the Medes) and it became part of the founding myth of the Persian empire itself.

The Neo-Babylonian Empire

The Babylonian king Nabopolassar (626–605) had no hesitation in recording his triumph. ‘I slaughtered the land of Assyria,’ he trumpeted, ‘I turned the hostile land into heaps and ruins. The Assyrian, who since distant days had ruled over all the peoples, and with his heavy yoke had brought injury to the people of the Land, his feet from Akkad I turned back, his yoke I threw off.’ Babylon enjoyed its finest period as an independent state between 625 and 539 BC. Its greatest king, Nebuchadnezzar II, who ruled from 604 to 562 and who was responsible for a final defeat of a joint army of Assyrians and Egyptians at Carchemish, won a great empire. Egypt was contained, Judah was subdued, and the major Phoenician trading city of Tyre captured after a siege of, according to legend, thirteen years.

Not much is known about the administration of this new empire but there is no doubt about the importance of Babylon as a centre of royal splendour. Massive walls and gates surrounded the city with a processional way leading from the main temple past the palace of the king and outside the city to the ceremonial building where the New Year was celebrated. Gold, silver, and lapis lazuli were used to decorate the walls. Display for its own sake replaces the more subtle propaganda of the reliefs of Assyrian palaces. Nebuchadnezzar also built to last. The bricks and other building materials are so well made that they are still reusable today. Buildings were designed to be placed on vast foundations so that they would be safe from the floods of the Euphrates that flowed through the middle of the city—the river itself was crossed by a graceful bridge.

Dominating the city was a great ziggurat to the god Marduk, whose cult centre this was, of which the foundations survive. It needed some 17 million bricks for its completion and may be the original of the Tower of Babel mentioned in the Book of Genesis. Like earlier ziggurats its purpose seems to have been to provide a link between earth and heaven, to tie the city to the world beyond. Babylonian mathematics and science flourished with ever more accurate recordings of historical and astronomical events. Even after the conquest of Babylonia by Cyrus the Great (see below, p. 104) the relatively tolerant rule of the Persians allowed this culture to survive many more centuries.

The Land of Israel

Among the peoples conquered by both the Assyrians and the Babylonians were Israelites (also known in the earliest period of their history as Hebrews). The origins of the Israelites are obscure. Outside their own writings there is virtually no mention of them as a people before the ninth century BC (as seen, p. 75, there is a

single reference to them from Egypt of about 1200 BC) and many of the events recorded as history in the Hebrew scriptures have no separate archaeological or documentary evidence to confirm them. This has made any discussion of their history intensely difficult. Since the nineteenth century there have been western scholars preoccupied with fitting the stories of the Old Testament to historical evidence, some of them implying that the existence of the Christian God could be substantiated if such links were found, while the establishment of Israel as a state in 1948 led to intensive efforts to confirm the link of the Jewish people with their territory back to kings such as David.

Much depends on the status given the Hebrew scriptures/Old Testament as a historical source. The scholar Amélie Kuhrt gives a balanced assessment: 'Like many accounts of the past, [the Old Testament] was not intended to provide a critical historical study; rather it contained stories detailing the interaction of a people, Israel, with their god, Yahweh, who had chosen them to work out his divine plan. It is a complex, ideologically driven compilation, within which stories were refashioned to drive home particular lessons of the past.' In other words, the historian should read the Hebrew scriptures as texts in which historical events have been shaped to provide a coherent understanding of how the Israelite people came to be, above all in relationship to their god, Yahweh. In this the scriptures remain the only account of a Near Eastern people that describes how they themselves visualized the emergence of their nation. Increasingly scholars are insisting that the history of Israel can only be fully understood if the first Israelites are placed among their neighbours of the region and seen as facing many of the same challenges. (See William Dever, *Who were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?*, Grand Rapids, Mich., 2006 for a study that surveys this difficult area within the context of recent scholarship.)

After the creation and the birth of humankind, told in Genesis, came the age of the Patriarchs when Abraham emerges as the father of Israel leading his people through the lands of the Near East. It is his grandson Jacob who is first associated (by Yahweh) with the name Israel and with the begetting of twelve sons who become the ancestors of the twelve tribes. Jacob's son Joseph is sold into slavery in Egypt but then rises to a high position with the pharaoh and settles his family there. After oppression by the pharaohs the Israelites fulfilled their promised destiny by being led out of Egypt by Moses across the Sinai desert (the celebrated 'Exodus') and eventually, after forty years of wandering, to the edge of 'the promised land', Canaan. It was in this time that Yahweh gave Moses the Ten Commandments, part of the covenant through which he linked himself to his chosen people. It is Joshua who completes the journey into Canaan.

The Israelites may have been able to establish themselves in Canaan because of the depopulation caused by the disruptions of the thirteenth and twelfth centuries (although the archaeological evidence for the early settlement is hard to interpret) but they found little security. This is the era of the Judges, one in which the Israelites enjoyed no central administration or religious or cultural coherence. The 'judges' may have been war leaders who struggled to keep an Israeli identity alive at a time

of turmoil. Among their early opponents were the Philistines, possibly other casualties of these upheavals, perhaps even, some have suggested, ‘sea peoples’ themselves who had come to settle along the south-western coast of Canaan. (The historian Herodotus, the first writer to use the word Palestine, may have derived it from ‘Philistine’.)

Eventually the twelve tribes gave allegiance to a single king, first Saul, then David, and, much later, Solomon. David is the Israelite king *par excellence*, unifier of the twelve tribes, defeater of the Philistines, and conqueror of Jerusalem, which became the capital of the kingdom. As yet little mention of David has been found in any document or inscription of the period outside the Hebrew scriptures. The reputation given to Solomon in the Book of Kings as a builder has, however, received some support from archaeologists who have found extensive rebuilding of several cities of the region in the tenth century BC. Even so, it is unlikely that the state would have stood out among its neighbours in this period.

After Solomon’s death his kingdom was split into two. In the north ten tribes preserved the name Israel, in the south the kingdom of Judah emerged, with Jerusalem a short distance within its territory. The citizens of Judah were known in Hebrew as *yehudi*, and from this, by way of the Greek *ioudaios* and the Latin *judaeus*, comes the English ‘Jew’. The two kingdoms coexisted for two centuries, although they were often at war with each other. In 722 BC the Assyrians annexed the northern kingdom and extinguished its national identity by deporting its inhabitants eastwards (see earlier, p. 94). Judah survived, but as a vassal kingdom of the Assyrian empire.

The Israelites rejoiced in a rich and varied body of sacred literature, much of it drawn from the common literary and religious heritage of the Near East. There is a creation story, narrated in the Book of Genesis, which has parallels with a similar account in the Babylonian epic *Enuma Elish*. In both myths God (Yahweh) fashions the world from a primordial abyss (this view was adopted by the early Christians but later discarded in favour of a creation of the world *ex nihilo*, ‘from nothing’, see later, p. 592) and his work of creation lasts six days after which he rests on the seventh. The story of the flood is, as has already been said, Sumerian in origin. The Garden of Eden seems rooted in a Near Eastern tradition, probably Mesopotamian, of an idyllic garden from which rivers flow. The theme of the righteous sufferer found in the Book of Job, perhaps the most profound and penetrating book of the Hebrew scriptures, is paralleled by similar stories in Babylonian literature. The range of the scriptures is wide, from the historical accounts of the formation of Israel and Judah to the gentle eroticism of the Song of Solomon, from the intensity of the Book of Job to the exultations and thanksgivings of many of the Psalms. As a varied collection of texts they evolved over a period of some 600 (some scholars would say 800) years and were eventually brought together as a single body of writings, the Hebrew scriptures, in about the second century BC.

The most outstanding feature of these writings and what gives them a coherent theme is that they focus on one god, Yahweh, the protector of the people of Israel. As we have seen, it was Yahweh who led the Israelites from Egypt and into Canaan, the promised land, having given them, through Moses, the Ten Commandments.

Early accounts of Yahweh see him as the supreme god among many. In Psalm 82, for instance, Yahweh asserts his dominance over a council of other gods. Gradually Yahweh becomes associated with the national identity of the Israelites, and other gods are seen as those of Israel's enemies, to be despised as such. (This is one of the themes of the eighth-century Book of Hosea.) A century later in the Book of Deuteronomy Yahweh is identified not only with the people of Israel but with a place, Jerusalem. Woven into Deuteronomy is a concern for social justice. All men are brothers and there should be special concern for the poor. The development of an ethical tradition is an essential element of the Hebrew scriptures and is underpinned with a concern for ritual purity expounded in meticulous detail in the Book of Leviticus.

Central to the worship of Yahweh was the concept of covenant. A covenant, an agreement that bound two people together, was widespread in the Near East. In this context it was an agreement made between Yahweh and his people, Israel. In its earliest recorded form it presents Yahweh as the protector of Israel who will remain faithful to his people for ever. Later, from Moses onwards, the covenant is seen as dependent on the good behaviour of the people of Israel. If they desert Yahweh he can punish them in retaliation. The books of the prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah, for instance, are dominated by warnings of the catastrophe about to fall on Israel because of its wrongdoings. The prophets themselves are burdened figures (Jeremiah talks at one point of being seduced and overpowered by Yahweh when asked to spread the bad news that the Israelites will be overrun by the Babylonians), and they try hopelessly to avoid the task Yahweh imposes on them.

Jeremiah's prophecies came true. Judah had retained a precarious independence among the surrounding city-states but Nebuchadrezzar proved too strong. Jerusalem appears to have been conquered twice by him, in 597 and 587, and, according to the Book of Kings, 10,000 inhabitants were carried off to Babylon. Although recent research suggests that the depopulation might not have been so great as the Hebrew sources suggest, from the psychological point of view this exile was a crucial moment in Jewish history and underlined the new image of Yahweh as one who could abandon his people to their suffering. It may have been seen as a time of desolation, but the exile was in many ways a creative one, and it was in this period that the early Hebrew scriptures were consolidated as a single collection. This first dispersion of the Jews was to establish an experience of exile that was to recur throughout Jewish history. Even when Jerusalem was restored to the Jews by the Persians many did not go back. The Temple was rebuilt about 516 BC but Jerusalem remained a relative backwater for centuries. (See the early chapters of Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Jerusalem: The Biography*, London, 2011, and New York, 2012.)

The Jews had created the world's first sustained monotheistic religion. (The Egyptian king Akhenaten's dominant sun god had died with him.) As the writings of the Old Testament show, it was a concept that left many unsolved philosophical problems about the nature of the one God. For some he was the source of both good and evil. ('I am Yahweh unrivalled, I form the light and create the dark. I make good fortune and create calamity,' writes the prophet Isaiah.) He was a protector god but

also a god of retribution, able to destroy not only Israel's enemies but also Israel itself when it offended him. The lesson of the Babylonian exile was that only through the admission of guilt and the acceptance of just punishment could the relationship be restored in a new covenant. There is some hope that this new covenant might be brought by an earthly ruler: in the prophecies of both Isaiah and Jeremiah a messiah is talked of, one who will bring everlasting justice and peace.

The monotheism of Israel needs to be contrasted with the different religious traditions of the other peoples of the Ancient Near East. The more common pattern was to have a mass of different deities living alongside each other (polytheism). At times one emerges as supreme over others, henotheism, which perhaps best describes the position of Amun in New Kingdom Egypt, or Ahura-Mazda in the Persian empire (below). The relationship between the supreme god and others varies. He may be linked to them through family ties, as with Zeus in Greece, he may absorb their identities (syncretism), or he may rule over them as distinct but subordinate deities. His supremacy may be maintained by presenting them as manifestations of his own power. Many of the successful civilizations described in this book were pragmatic in their religious policies, keeping their own gods as supreme, but tolerating the existence of others.

The Phoenicians

These centuries also saw a transformation along the Levantine coast. There were cities here such as Byblos that had a history stretching back thousands of years. In the second millennium Ugarit, Tyre, and Sidon were all important trading centres. Before 1200 BC the economies of these cities were linked to those of the inland city-states, through which they served as intermediaries with the outside world. During the disruptions associated with the sea peoples, however, the original inhabitants of Canaan (from whom the Israelites distinguished themselves) lost much of their coastline and inland territories so that by the tenth century they controlled only 200 kilometres of coast (from an original 500) and the narrow strip of land that ran between the coast and the mountains. This quickly rose to some 3,000 metres. This proved, in fact, their salvation as they were well protected from invaders from the east, yet had good access to timber on the mountain slopes. The cities were well sited in bays and inlets while two cities, Tyre and Arvad, were on islands and virtually impregnable.

Gradually trade revived and there is a record of an Egyptian official, Wenamun, visiting Byblos in about 1100 in search of cedarwood for the shrine of Amun in Thebes. With Egypt's status in decline he is treated with some condescension, and not even allowed to enter Byblos until his money has arrived from Egypt, but his account suggests that the king of Byblos had a fleet of twenty cargo ships with access to another fifty coastal vessels in nearby Sidon. So there is already some trading activity although Wenamun's account also mentions pirates along the coast. The city that took the lead in expanding trade networks was Tyre. The city appears to have

had a more flexible approach to commerce than Byblos with individual merchant families, rather than the king, taking the initiative in seeking outlets. By the ninth century, individual merchants from Tyre have, through their agents, set up outposts in Babylonia. Tyre's reputation spread widely. Writing some 300 years later, after Tyre had fallen to the Babylonians, the prophet Ezekiel laments the demise of 'that city standing at the edge of the sea, doing business with the nations in innumerable islands... your frontiers stretched out far to sea, those who built you made you perfect in beauty... Then you were rich and glorious surrounded by the seas.' (This evocation of a prosperous city was so powerful that the Venetians later adopted it for themselves!) The Book of Ezekiel details, in chapter 27, all the many peoples from beyond the Euphrates in the east to the Arab peninsula in the south that dealt with the city.

The Canaanites would probably have always been dependent on trade. Although the coastline was fertile it could never have supported their population. However, when the Assyrians demanded tribute of the cities, particularly in metals, they were forced to trade overseas. It is certainly true that by the ninth century the Canaanites were penetrating deep into the Mediterranean, and it was here that they came into contact with another trading people, the Greeks, who shared with them a trading-post at al-Mina on the Orontes river through which contacts could be made with Mesopotamia. The Greeks, whose own trading activities were still undeveloped, found it difficult to distinguish the traders they worked with and they gave them the collective term 'Phoenician', which is probably derived from the reddish purple dye extracted from molluscs for which they were famous throughout the Mediterranean. The mingling of Greeks and the Phoenicians, who had absorbed much of the cultural heritage of the Ancient Near East, was to be of profound importance in the history of the western world (although the Greeks may have had other contacts; from the eighth century their shields and helmets suggest the direct influence of Assyria). The ensuing story will be told in Chapters 9 and 10.

Egypt in the First Millennium

The most distant of the victims of Assyria was Egypt. After the death of Rameses XI, 1069 BC, Egypt underwent a period of increasing fragmentation (the so-called Third Intermediate Period, c.1070–664) as provincial families and, above all, the priests of Thebes strengthened their local bases against the power of the central ruler. At the same time, a Twenty-First Dynasty emerged at a new capital city in the Delta, Tanis, built a few kilometres from Per-Rameses (whose water courses may have silted up.) The two centres of power coexisted but their proclamations of power concealed the fragmentation of Egypt. In the north Libyan immigrants became important and one leader, Osorkon, married into the royal family at Tanis and founded a new dynasty, the Twenty-Second. The Libyans were more tolerant of sharing power and so subsidiary rulers emerged across Egypt. At times in the ninth and eighth centuries BC there were as many as eleven of them competing for power.

This fragmented state could not last. A revived Nubian dynasty, the Kushites, who had grown wealthy on trading, now emerged and expanded northwards. They used Napata, the furthest point of Egyptian control in the New Kingdom, as their Nubian capital. The Kushites were well aware of the cultural and political heritage of Egypt, and their rulers sensed how they could exploit it for their own ends. In 727 BC their most ambitious king, Piankhi (or Piye), marched against the rulers of the north, claiming that he was leading a campaign on behalf of Amun against rebels to the god. When he reached the Delta he shrewdly declared his allegiance to the sun god Ra, always stronger in the north than Amun, by ritually purifying himself at the temple at Heliopolis. He was then acclaimed ruler of all Egypt and so founded a new dynasty, the Twenty-Fifth. His victory stele at Napata shows eight rulers grovelling before him. Piankhi proved adept at manipulating the traditions of the past. He even built a pyramid tomb for himself and his family at Napata (although in a form different from those at Memphis) and appointed his sister as the Amun's 'Wife' in Thebes in a tradition now centuries old. This search for roots in the Egyptian past as far back as the Old and Middle Kingdom continued under Piankhi's successors who went a step further by formally including Egypt into their kingdom. They built at all the ancient religious sites of Egypt, including Memphis and Thebes, used traditional royal titles, and decorated their temples with themes from the Old Kingdom. They even expanded into Asia again.

It was just at this time of relative unity that Assyria struck. A conquest of Egypt had long been among its ambitions, and Egyptian incursions into Palestine provoked the empire further. In the early seventh century the Assyrian king Esarhadon was able to invade Egypt across the Sinai desert. Memphis was ravaged in 671, and the Nubian ruler, Taharqo, was forced to retreat south. In 664/663 the Assyrians attacked again, and this time reached as far as Thebes. The religious capital of Egypt, sacred and inviolate for so many long centuries, was sacked. This was a humiliating blow to the Kushites and they were forced out of Egypt to Nubia (where they maintained a kingdom around the city of Meroe for several hundred more years).

The Assyrians were too far from their homeland to be able to maintain permanent control of Egypt and they were forced to rule through collaborators. They chose one Psamtek (in Greek Psammetichus), ruler of a small Delta kingdom based on the town of Sais, as their instrument of control. Psamtek was as adept in his manipulation of the Egyptian past as the Nubian kings had been. He sent his daughter Nitocris to Thebes and installed her as the 'wife' of Amun-Ra, thus ensuring his own control over the south. Artistic styles were modelled on those of the Old and Middle Kingdoms and Memphis was confirmed as the country's capital.

Through a mixture of diplomacy and force Psamtek eventually established his rule over the whole of Egypt, founding a new dynasty in his turn, the Twenty-Sixth (also known as the Saite Dynasty, after Sais, its capital). Luckily for him, the power of Assyria was waning and Psamtek remained unchallenged by his nominal overlords. He was to rule for over fifty years, and he and his immediate successors saw a period of unity, wealth, and cultural renaissance. Nobles were buried in magnificent tombs

and once again temples were built on a colossal scale. For the first time Egypt created a navy (probably as an aid to defending its interests in Palestine—it was equipped with Greek-style war galleys) and was able to compete on equal terms with other trading nations of the Mediterranean and Black Sea. The dynasty was also highly receptive to foreigners. About 620 BC Greek traders were allowed by Psamtek I to set up a trading centre at Naucratis on a branch of the Nile near Sais. Greek mercenaries soon formed part of the Egyptian army (together with Phoenicians, Syrians, and Jews, many of whom were refugees from the Assyrian conquests). A thousand kilometres up the Nile some of their signatures have been found inscribed on the leg of a colossal statue of Rameses II. As was noted earlier Greeks began visiting the country as tourists and were so overawed by what they saw that some came to believe that their own civilization was descended from Egypt's.

The Rise of the Persian (Achaemenid) Empire

In the mid-sixth century an empire finally arose which managed to conquer and consolidate its hold over the entire Ancient Near East, including, for much of the period, Egypt. It is known as the Achaemenid empire, the name being derived from the legendary founder of its ruling family, a king known as Achaemenes.

The empire was founded by one of the great conquerors of history, Cyrus II (ruled 559–530 BC). Cyrus was descended from a line of kings that had emerged in the late seventh century at Persis (modern Fars, on the Iranian plateau) out of the earlier Elamite state. (The Elamites whose state was based on the south-western part of modern Iran had been a major player in Near Eastern politics, especially during the second millennium BC.) However, Cyrus represented a distinct Persian people who had possibly infiltrated the plateau as pastoralists from central Asia as the authority of the Elamite state declined. To his north were another people, the Medes, who controlled the fertile valleys which led down into the Iranian plateau and who had recently shown their military prowess in the wars against the Assyrians. In 550 the Medes attacked Cyrus possibly as a reaction to his growing power. Their defeat led to the incorporation of the Medes and their wealthy capital, Ecbatana, within the Persian state. The uplands of the Medes offered rich grazing and fine horses as well as more manpower. Neighbouring states now began to resent Cyrus' kingdom as it expanded further both to the west and east. King Croesus of Lydia, a state that had been consolidated in the seventh century in western Anatolia, attacked the Persians in the mid-540s, but he too was defeated and his capital, Sardis, brought into what was now an empire. It remains a moving experience to stand below the rocky citadel of Sardis and read Herodotus' account of the capture (Book I of *The Histories*, 79–84). Next the prosperous Greek city-states of the coastline of Anatolia were bullied into accepting Persian control.

Cyrus' conquest of the Greek coast was probably followed by campaigns as far east as central Asia and Afghanistan. Finally, he turned back to Babylonia in the fertile plains of Mesopotamia. Following the glorious reign of Nebuchadnezzar, the

state had lost some of its vigour. Its last king Nabonidus (succeeded in 555) was not of royal lineage but had been a state official. He seems to have been accepted by the nobles but threats to his kingdom meant that he spent many years of his reign campaigning abroad, particularly in Arabia. One result was that he was accused of neglecting the god Marduk, whose rituals required an annual ceremony at each New Year in Babylon itself. Confronted by Cyrus, the Babylonian state fell after one major battle (Opis in 539 BC), and Cyrus found himself master as far west and south as the borders of Egypt.

It was now that Cyrus showed his political abilities. Despite carrying out a massacre of his opponents at Opis he managed to legitimize his rule by claiming that he was restoring traditional order to Babylon after Nabonidus had threatened its prosperity through his lack of religious orthodoxy. So it was that ‘all the inhabitants of Babylon, as well as the entire country of Sumer and Akkad, princes and governors, bowed to Cyrus and kissed his feet, jubilant that he had received the kingship, and with shining faces happily greeted him as a master through whose help they had come to life from death and had all been spared death and disaster, and they worshipped his name’. He was accepted by the Babylonian elite while the defeat of the city allowed him to liberate the Israelites from their bondage and be acclaimed by them as a deliverer. Traditional accounts link him to the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem that he opportunistically proclaimed was through the will of Yahweh. Among his new subjects were the Phoenicians, whose sailors were to provide the manpower for an imperial navy.

The Achaemenid empire now stretched over 4,000 kilometres from east to west and 1,500 from north to south, 6 million square kilometres with an estimated population of some 35 million. Its territories were so varied and, in many cases, so uncontrollable that it was impossible to impose authoritarian rule but, as the treatment of Babylon showed, this was not Cyrus’ way. So long as the ultimate authority of himself as ‘King of Kings’ and the Persian god Ahura-Mazda were recognized, local cultures and religions were free to thrive. Taxes were kept relatively low—it has been noted that Cyrus’ capital at Pasargadae was nothing like so lavish as those of the Babylonian or Assyrian kings. Foreign craftsmen at the city were free to display their own styles. Palaces show the influence of Assyrian art, the Greeks brought their own traditions of stone working, while Cyrus’ own tomb echoes models from Anatolia. (A later Greek account of the tomb tells how Cyrus’ body was encased in a gold sarcophagus with a tapestry from Babylon as coverlet.)

The maintenance of such a vast empire depended heavily on the energy and charisma of Cyrus. On his death his successor, his son Cambyses, was successful in extending the empire yet further through the conquest of Egypt and Cyprus. The Persian armies invaded Egypt in 525 BC, defeating king Psamtek III and besieging his capital at Memphis. The city fell and the last of the native Egyptian kings was, according to some sources, carried off in triumph to the Persian capital at Susa (other sources say he was executed in Memphis). As mentioned above, Egyptian sources suggest that, like his father, Cambyses was shrewd enough to integrate himself into local custom. At Sais he restored the temple of Neith, the mother of Re, to

the native priesthood and then carried out the traditional rituals of homage. He seems to have used the local elites to sustain his rule. While the Assyrian assault on Egypt was soon diluted by Psamtek (see above), now a new phase in Egyptian history had begun, one in which foreign rulers, Persians, Greeks, and Romans, would exploit the centuries-old traditions of loyalty to a central ruler to serve their own ends.

By 525 BC therefore, the Persian empire extended over the whole of western Asia. However, Cambyses faced considerable internal unrest while he was still in Egypt, and shortly before his death in 522 there was a coup by one of his generals, Darius. This could have been the moment when the empire collapsed but Darius himself proved a military and organizational genius and, by 520, he had subdued the revolts and stabilized the empire. Without any justification, it seems, Darius claimed descent from Achaemenes, and successfully exploited his background to gain the allegiance of the heartlands of the empire. Perhaps more than his predecessors, he rallied the Persian nobility behind him and consolidated them as a ruling elite. It is his achievements which were proclaimed on the great inscription carved on a rock face 80 metres high at Behistun in north-western Iran in three languages, Elamite, Akkadian (the script used by Babylonians and Assyrians), and Old Persian, a language that Darius identified with his kingship. (As already noted, one of the major feats of nineteenth-century archaeology was the copying and deciphering of Akkadian from this inscription by the Englishman Henry Rawlinson.) Campaigns followed in the east, where control was consolidated over the vast stretches of plains and mountains that make up Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the eastern parts of modern Iran. About 514 Darius crossed the Hellespont into Thrace and fought some inconclusive campaigns against the native Scythian peoples.

Darius legitimized his rule through the one god, Ahura-Mazda, who was prepared to preside benignly over the lesser gods of the peoples Darius controlled. King and god reinforced each other's legitimacy. 'A great god is Ahura-Mazda, who created the earth, who created yonder sky, who created man, who created happiness for man, who made Darius king, one king over many, one lord of many,' runs part of the inscription on Darius' tomb, and reliefs on this and later royal tombs show king and god each raising a hand to each other in greeting. A myth of succession is created that through the deceit of rival pretenders the empire had fallen into disorder and the god and Darius had restored both righteousness and good order. In another royal inscription Darius prides himself on his calm temper that enables him to dispense justice for all his people with fairness and equanimity.

The empire was divided into twenty satrapies, or administrative regions, each under an imperial appointee, normally a Persian. He was granted a royal estate whose produce he could keep for himself. In line with the generally tolerant attitude to local peoples, ancient capitals, Memphis, Sardis, Ecbatana, Babylon, were preserved as centres of local government and many of the resources gathered in taxation or tribute were stored locally. (Massive amounts of silver were found by Alexander's men in the citadel in Babylon, for instance.) Each capital kept its own records of administrative decisions and there are even cases of local officials writing

in to check the details of royal decrees that they kept in these archives. The reliefs depicting processions of subjects, notably at the royal palace founded by Darius I at Persepolis, show each national group in its distinctive dress and carrying its regional produce to the court. (Herodotus lists the tribute expected of each people (Book III of *The Histories*, 90–4).) Some are even allowed to bear arms. While in Egypt the subject peoples would have been diminished in stature and in Assyria eliminated, here they are left with some pride. Local languages were respected, many public inscriptions were multilingual, as at Behistun, while Aramaic was used as the *lingua franca* of administration. It was a system flexible enough for the kings to keep contact with the more remote tribal peoples, normally through buying their allegiance with gifts. Their loyalty was essential if free passage through the empire was to be preserved.

Communications were good with a network of roads criss-crossing the empire. The celebrated Royal Road, the backbone of the empire's communications, ran from Susa to Sardis, the former capital of Lydia, in the west with any dangerous stretch or crossing continuously under guard. Along it messages could be carried more than 300 kilometres a day. Official travellers were given a pass allowing them to draw rations for the next day from each station on the road, and the record that this had been done was then sent up to the capital. This effective and well-policed communications system allowed wealth to be channelled upwards, to the great palaces of Pasargadae, the original sixth-century capital of the empire, and Persepolis in the homeland of the dynasty and to Susa, the ancient capital of the Elamites, which Darius made the administrative capital of the empire. As before the dynasty drew freely on the resources and skills of its subject peoples. Darius' palace from Susa was built of cedars from the Lebanon with other timbers brought from Afghanistan. Lapis lazuli came, as it had always done, from the east, gold from Sardis and Bactria. Egypt provided its most common precious metal, silver, as well as ivory that also came in from Nubia and India. Once again it was the Greeks who were the expert stone-cutters, the Medes and the Egyptians the finest craftsmen in gold and wood, while the Babylonians were responsible for baking bricks for the palace.

Despite the overall efficiency and good order of the empire it could hardly be maintained in absolute peace for decade after decade. In 499 BC the western part of the empire was shaken by a major revolt by the Greek cities of the Ionian coast. Darius was forced into confrontation with a people who were to prove the match of his empire. For the next 170 years, the empire and its Greek neighbours were to have a complicated relationship that was finally to end in the overthrow of the empire by Alexander. Before the story of this relationship goes further, an introduction must be made to the Greeks and their sea, the Mediterranean.

The Mediterranean, and its neighbour the Black Sea, are inseparable from the lives of most of the civilizations of this book. Surveyed as a whole, the Mediterranean, 'the sea between the lands' is almost self-contained. There are just two outlets (if the Suez Canal opened only in 1869 is ignored), the Straits of Gibraltar, the Pillars of Hercules of antiquity, and the Dardanelles that gives access to the Black Sea. Some five million years ago the sea was closed entirely and the water had evaporated, leaving just desert. Then water broke through from the Atlantic and very quickly the basin became filled. As a result of the limited access, the loss of water by evaporation remains a problem. Some is replaced by the rivers, the Nile, the Po in northern Italy, the Rhône, and a host of smaller ones. Four per cent of the total needed comes from the Black Sea whose river system, including the Danube, always provides this inner sea with more water than it needs. This leaves the Straits of Gibraltar, only fourteen kilometres wide, as the main provider of fresh water, and the rush of currents inwards here and in the Dardanelles makes leaving the Mediterranean challenging for sailors. In the reworking of the legend of Jason and the Argonauts by the third-century BC Greek writer Apollonius Rhodius Jason and his men have to resort to rowing up through the Dardanelles to reach the Black Sea along 'the narrow strait of the winding passage, hemmed in on both sides by rugged cliffs, while an eddying current from below was washing against the ship as she moved on'.

The peoples of the Mediterranean gradually came to grasp its extent. By the end of the sixth century BC, the Greek geographer Hecataeus recognizes the Mediterranean as 'the great sea' and, in another fragment, 'our sea'. Hecataeus gives an account of the full circuit along the coast from the Straits of Gibraltar round back to what is now Morocco. The Romans, of course, were fully aware of the unity of the sea as they were the first civilization to control all of it. 'We have long seen that vast stretch of sea from the Ocean to the furthest shore of Pontus held as if it were a single safe and closed harbour', as the Roman statesman Cicero was to put it five centuries after Hecataeus.

The sea defines the land. Strabo, writing in the early first century AD and the most important source of ancient geography, suggests that 'most of all it is the sea that delineates precisely the layout of the land, creating gulfs, and sea basins, traversable narrows, and, in the same way, isthmuses, peninsulas and capes; in this the rivers and mountains also play their part'. The rugged coastline means that although the

Mediterranean is only about 3,800 kilometres from east to west there are some 22,000 kilometres of shoreline. About a thousand harbours have been plotted along the coast, an average of some 30 to 40 kilometres apart and so a day's sailing in good conditions. Medieval maps bristle with their names. The word port can mean anything from a major centre such as Alexandria to a beach of the kind described by the historian Herodotus where Carthaginian traders would lay out their cargo and then see whether the natives would offer enough gold for it. There was ample opportunity to stop off to rest, take in fresh water, and trade.

Many rivers gave access to sheltered docksides inland so that one finds major cities growing up at the point either where a river becomes fordable or where navigation ends. A good example, where much of the original dockside has been excavated, is Aquileia at the head of the Adriatic. Routes led from there northwards over the Alps and into northern Europe as far as the Baltic, a rich source of amber for the craftsmen of Aquileia. To travel to Britain did not require a hazardous journey through the Straits of Gibraltar and northwards across the volatile Bay of Biscay. Instead, one moved up the Rhône and then into the valley of the Rhine and so to the North Sea. In the eastern Mediterranean the Nile and the Orontes also opened the way inland so that the economy as a whole drew on enormous inland resources. The eastern coastlines of the Mediterranean are linked to the civilizations of the Ancient Near East, as the cargo of the Uluburun shipwreck (see earlier, p. 36) makes clear.

Three major peninsulas run down into the Mediterranean, the Iberian (modern Spain and Portugal), the Italian, and the Greek, which extends outwards into the Aegean through a pattern of islands. So this is also a fragmented sea and its inner seas such as the Adriatic and the Tyrrhenian Sea have their own histories, shown in the struggles between their peoples to have control. Etruscans, Greeks, and Carthaginians jostled against each other in the Tyrrhenian Sea in the fifth century. The Aegean was also seen as forming its own world—the philosopher Plato described it as a pond around which the Greek cities were gathered as if they were frogs.

All three peninsulas are dominated by mountains. Mountains make up three-quarters of the land surface of Greece and there are relatively few areas of fertile lowland—the plain of Thessaly is the largest. Mountains have proved important in that they limit the area for cultivation, fragment communities, and provide a further incentive to travel by sea. In the Peloponnese in the 1930s only a sixth of the land was being cultivated. Italy can be seen as a long ridge (the Apennines) broken in the north by the Po valley, the most fertile area of the peninsula. In Spain there is a strong contrast between the fertile plains of the coasts and the mountainous interior. Mountains define agriculture in another way. When rain does fall, and in the Mediterranean this is normally in the winter rather than summer months, it tends to cascade downwards destroying topsoil. In response the farmer has to terrace soil so that it is not lost.

It is not only that rainfall in the Mediterranean varies by season, there are quite dramatic variations year by year. To take one modern example, in the 1960s the annual rainfall in Kavala, the ancient Neapolis on the northern Aegean, varied between

252 and 897 millimetres, and research suggests the climate was little different in classical times. This means that a 'good' year might produce far more than is needed while a 'bad' year far less. It was coping with this variability that was important and, as it could not be planned for, every year had to be focused on overproduction. Successful farming always needed ingenuity and this is being increasingly recognized as a result of field surveys. The famous Mediterranean trio of crops, vines, olives, and grain, were grown together as an insurance against the failure of one or the other. Being hardier and more dependable, barley was a more popular, if less nutritious, crop to grow than wheat, the preferred grain of the elite. The best combinations for each ecological niche, whether plain, valley, or grazing land, evolved through trial and error. If a landowner was lucky and accumulated more land, it made more sense to choose a plot with a different ecological make-up so that the chances of some crop coming up somewhere were increased. So one finds wealthier farmers moving from one plot to another often over quite long distances. A single large estate was an extravagance (or alternatively, especially in the Roman empire, a status symbol).

The Black Sea has often been treated as if it was somehow a backwater of the Mediterranean. However, once access against the outflowing current had been negotiated, it offered important resources. Its northern shores enjoy a continental climate that means it is rich in grain and the risk of crop failure is much lower than it is in the Mediterranean. On the southern shores of the sea, the climate is similar to that of the Mediterranean and so there was already an exchange economy within the Black Sea that was broken into by the Greek traders from the eighth century BC.

Should the Mediterranean be seen as a unique ecology that fostered distinctive cultures and civilizations that would never have been developed elsewhere? The standard of debate on the question was set at a high level by one of the finest works of history of the twentieth century, Fernand Braudel's *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, originally published in France in 1949 and only in English, from a revised French edition, in two volumes, in 1972–3. Braudel had become fascinated by the Mediterranean early in his career but it was when isolated as a German prisoner of war that he conceived the first draft of his great work. For Braudel the Mediterranean was never one sea but a series of interlocking seas and this allowed him to respond to the many different environmental niches. The book is famous for its lengthy consideration of the underlying parameters of the Mediterranean environment, starting with the mountains and plains before Braudel moves on to the sea itself. Then he explores the economic background before, in his final part, looking at events themselves in the sixteenth century. What gives the book its resonance is the elegance of the writing and the immense amount of archival material that fills out the analysis. Its approach, the consideration of *la longue durée*, the slow unfolding of history within the limits of the environment, made it the most important work of the French *Annales* school of history.

In another important, but more controversial, book, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford and Malden, Mass., 2000), Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell have concentrated on the ancient and medieval

periods. Horden and Purcell would follow Braudel in emphasizing the importance of the environment but they lay much greater stress on the Mediterranean as a series of 'microregions' along the long coastline each of which exploits its own ecological niche. The authors stress the range of these, not only arable and grazing land, but woodland and wetland. Wetlands have been largely neglected in studies of Mediterranean agriculture but, as Horden and Purcell show, they provide a welcome variety of plant and animal life, more permanent and dependable sources of water than rainfall, and the water can be directed through channels to create access inland. It is this diversity of 'microecologies'—that demand a wide range of skills if they are to be exploited to the full—which underpins Horden and Purcell's stress on the ingenuity and adaptability of the Mediterranean peasant. Communities had to reach out to each other to survive and so the authors introduce the concept of 'connectivity' as being a vital feature of any history 'of' the Mediterranean (against history 'in' the Mediterranean, the events that just happen to have taken place within its shores). This provides a welcome emphasis on the continual interchange of cultures and the book provides an overwhelming amount of material to back its case. However, was 'connectivity', undoubtedly important, something unique to the Mediterranean? Barry Cunliffe in his *Facing the Ocean: The Atlantic and its Peoples* (Oxford and New York, 2001) has argued for much the same 'connectivity' among the peoples of the Atlantic seaboard. It could be seen as the normal state of affairs along any coastline. There was surely a similar 'connectivity' between the two ecologies of the Black Sea. So there are difficulties in defining 'connectivity', plotting the range of 'connectivities' and their ebb and flow and establishing whether they distinguished the Mediterranean experience from that of the Atlantic seaboard.

Another criticism of Horden and Purcell has been that they fail to recognize the importance of urbanization in the Mediterranean economy. They argue that 'there is no particular quality of urban space that automatically colours belief and action within it'. Certainly some 80 per cent or more of the population of the Mediterranean were engaged in agriculture and their produce underpinned the economy. In written texts, they have been largely ignored, outside records from the landowning elite, and it has only been intensive fieldwork and surveys that have begun to balance traditional accounts biased towards urban life. However, the cities did act as a focus. The Greeks preferred to be in settlements, from which they would travel out into the fields, rather than in isolated farmhouses, and their cities were the centres of worship and politics. In short, Greek civilization was embedded in the *poleis*. As colonizers spread westwards, the city was the only way they could establish footholds in hostile territory. The larger cities distorted the trade routes. Rome sucked in enormous amounts of grain from Egypt and north Africa. A naval power such as Athens needed timber from the northern Aegean, and the closing of the Dardanelles to her grain fleets marked her defeat in the Peloponnesian War. Any city with an elite fostered craftsmen who needed the raw material for luxury objects and so added to the patterns of trade. So one could argue that the cities were important elements of the Mediterranean economy.

If survival in the Mediterranean was dominated by 'connectivities', then one might expect some stability of relationships over time. However, there were moments of complete breakdown. The disintegration of trade routes in 1200 BC saw the shrinking of all activity and contacts between cultures and it is three to four hundred years before confidence returns. Something similar was to happen with the fall of the western Roman empire after AD 500 with recovery of confidence and trading contacts again taking centuries. The civil wars of the Roman empire in the first century BC saw another deterioration in prosperity and this was quickly exploited by pirates who could take advantage of the many inlets along the northern coasts. So the historian must be sensitive to the fragility of life in the Mediterranean, the difficulties of survival on the sea have always to be set in the wider context of political relationships.

This would be the view of David Abulafia in his recent study of Mediterranean history, *The Great Sea* (New York, 2010, and London, 2012). Against Braudel and Horden and Purcell, Abulafia would argue that time did bring significant change, that the decisions of individuals such as Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, or the emperor Augustus had a major impact. Alexander shattered the traditional Greek world of the city-state and his successors built empires in the eastern Mediterranean. In the west, the defeat of Hannibal and the subsequent destruction of the Carthaginian empire provided the setting for the expansion of Rome. The emperor Augustus consolidated the victories of his uncle Julius Caesar and brought order to a Mediterranean that had been fragmented by the civil wars of the first century. The Roman historian Suetonius tells of the passengers and crew of a merchantman who, meeting the dying emperor Augustus off the coast of Campania, 'wished him the greatest of good fortune because, they said, they owed their lives to him and their liberty to sail the seas: in a word, their entire freedom and prosperity'. Chaos and breakdown in the Mediterranean were caused and overcome by political actions.

Even so Horden and Purcell have highlighted an important issue. It is the uneven distribution of raw materials that has been a major stimulus of trade. There was no culture or civilization in the Mediterranean that was self-sufficient. If grain is the basis for nutrition (and up to two-thirds of a diet might be provided by it) then access to the more fertile areas, those in particular which had enough rainfall to support the more nutritious wheat—Egypt, Sicily and southern Italy, the Black Sea and, later, north Africa—would always be important. The Ancient Near East, and its far-flung trade routes, provided luxury goods and textiles, the northern Aegean timber, Cyprus copper, Etruria (central Italy) iron, copper, and silver, and Tartessus, the hinterland inland from Cadiz in southern Spain, silver (the commodity required to meet the demands of the Assyrians for tribute). There must have been ever-shifting cross-currents of trade in the staple commodities as harvests succeeded or failed in different regions.

Sailing within the Mediterranean has always presented its challenges. The winter is wet and windy and the sea closes down between March and October. Even though there were now long periods of stability and warmth, the gathering of a summer storm is still an exhilarating experience to watch (from land!) and there is always a

sense of volatility in the Mediterranean air. Homer describes the drama when the god Poseidon sends a tempest to destroy Odysseus. As the seas swelled 'a monstrous wave crashed over him from above, driving upon him violently and whirling his raft round and round. He was thrown out clear of the raft having let the steering oar slip from his hands. A hideous tempest of wrestling winds descended on him, snapping his mast in two while sail and sailyard were tossed to a distance in the sea.' Odysseus was lucky to have been washed up on shore, battered but alive.

Yet for much of the summer currents and prevailing winds are relatively stable and there are no tides so that a pattern of trade routes became established. The best combinations had to be bargained for; often a wind was strong and consistent enough to take a ship against a current. As ships in the ancient Mediterranean were square sailed they did best in a following wind and in the eastern Mediterranean these prevailed from north to south. So while it took three days to sail from Athens to Rhodes and a further four days on to Egypt, the journey back would take twice as long. Detailed studies of voyages between Venice and the Holy Land in the sixteenth century show that it took an average of forty-three days to reach the Holy Land, ninety-three to return. Working one's way up from Athens to the grain supplies of the Black Sea through the swift southward current of the Dardanelles at its mouth would take so long that only a single passage a year was possible. There were other difficult passages. The crossing between the Ionian sea and Sicily was always challenging as it could be disrupted by unfavourable winds even in midsummer. The meeting place between the Adriatic and the Ionian Sea was particularly tricky. In the western Mediterranean the Straits of Gibraltar became impassable when the winds were from the west and ships often had to wait for up to two months for them to change. With lighter cargoes it was frequently quicker to bypass the Straits by transferring them to the Atlantic overland.

The heavier the cargo—if one wants to see how heavy observe the monumental granite columns, 40 feet high, on the façade of the Pantheon in Rome which were transported all the way from Aswan in Egypt (and it seems that even larger ones were planned for)—the more important it was to use currents rather than fight against them and it was the merchant ships, particularly those laden with metal or marble, which needed to exploit their support. So that if one traces, from archaeological finds on land and shipwrecks, the routes of metal-bearing ships of the Late Bronze Age, they run from Cyprus to Asia Minor then across the Ionian Sea to Sicily and finally along the Spanish coast. Ships setting out westwards from north Africa towards the Straits of Gibraltar would find it easier to cross northwards to the Spanish coast and then hug it on their journey west. Those making their way east towards Sicily kept along the north African coast, then headed northwards to the coast of Sardinia from where they could approach Sicily from the west. While one would imagine, from looking at a map, that the port of Carthage on the north African coast would be a port of call for Phoenician ships heading west, it was the opposite. They would only approach it when coming back from the west and this may be one reason why it was able to establish its independence from the home cities of Phoenicia (see pp. 145, 381). Some of the most important ports, such as

the island of Ibiza off the Spanish coast and the island of Motya on the coast of Sicily, prospered because they were where routes overlapped. The sacred island of Delos in the central Aegean benefited from being at a point where routes crossed from both east and west and from north to south.

There has been a long history of activity in the Mediterranean. Sometime before 11000 BC intrepid seafarers were reaching the island of Melos in search of obsidian, a volcanic rock that could be worked to give a sharper edge than flint. Shipping was primitive, crafts probably constructed from cut reeds, but it was a cold phase—water was trapped on mountain tops and lower sea levels left more land exposed. Sailing therefore was easier than it later became. The islands of Sicily and Crete have early settlers but the evidence from Crete shows that, at first, they retained little contact with the sea. This isolationism can be seen also on the island of Malta. The earliest Maltese may have arrived from Sicily as early as 5700 BC and settled as farmers. By 4000 they had begun to develop a distinct culture and by 3500 monumental buildings, shrines, or temples where cult worship of a Mother Goddess took place. These pre-date even the Egyptian pyramids. The community appears to have lived at peace with each other and did not even have metal until about 2500 BC. It survived until the middle of the sixteenth century BC when Malta was overrun, probably again by migrants from Sicily.

The stimulus that defined the first regular trade routes was bronze. Once the transformation of copper into bronze by the addition of tin had been grasped, the superiority of the metal for everything from prestige goods to effective weaponry made both metals sought after. As yet the ships, of which some primitive scratched drawings survive, were propelled only by oars. The core of trade was in the Cyclades, the islands to the south-east of the Greek mainland, and it was here that one of the most distinctive and attractive traditions of European art was founded, the famous Cycladic figurines. They are sometimes simply flat heads with raised noses, or whole bodies with folded arms, often figures playing 'violins', or violin shapes on their own. They are grave goods but what their purpose was is completely unclear and it may have shifted over the twelve hundred years, from 3000 to 1800 BC, when they were crafted. Perhaps they acted as guides to the next world for the deceased or were 'musical companions'.

One of the beneficiaries of the growing trade was Troy, the city that haunts the western imagination and epic poetry through its tales of the famous Greek siege and capture, traditionally placed in the twelfth century BC. The site is now inland but was once on the coast close to a harbour that had silted up by the time of Homer's epics. It was a small settlement in 3000 BC but had prospered into a fortified city with watchtowers by 2500. The Trojans were probably a mixed population of those attracted by the possibilities of trade, servicing boats waiting to enter the Dardanelles, and exploiting the fertile plains behind the city for wool and timber. The second phase of the city, from 2500 to 2300 BC, Troy II as it is conventionally labelled, saw wonderful craftsmanship, notably the gold jewellery and gold and silver containers that the first excavator, Heinrich Schliemann, believed to be the jewels of Helen of Troy. (He was at least a thousand years too late in his dating and

he did not help his reputation by smuggling 'the treasure of Priam', the legendary king of Troy, out of the Ottoman empire—its subsequent history is a story in itself. See Caroline Moorehead, *Lost and Found: The 9,000 Treasures of Troy: Heinrich Schliemann and the Gold that Got Away*, New York, 1997.)

Troy was insignificant compared to the great cities of the Ancient Near East; there is no evidence that its inhabitants could even write, and it was essentially an entrepôt at a strategically important point on the trading networks of this period. Another, much less well-known site is Poliochni on the island of Lemnos, which also exploited its central position on the trade routes of the northern Aegean through its harbour, good drinking water, and fertile land. It was certainly active long before Troy and has even been seen as the earliest known city in Europe. It was destroyed in an earthquake at the end of the third millennium, at a time when Troy II was devastated by fire. Troy, too, never recovered its earlier prosperity and by 2000 the centre of trade had shifted south to the emerging civilization on the island of Crete. An important new phase in the history of the Mediterranean was about to begin. (Cyprian Broodbank's *The Making of the Middle Sea, A History of the Mediterranean from the Beginning to the Emergence of the Classical World*, London and New York, 2013, is an innovative and probing study that provides essential new material for the more advanced student.)

The Minoans

The island of Crete occupies a central position in the eastern Mediterranean. It is accessible from Egypt, the Near East, mainland Greece, and from the west. The island is fertile and well wooded and towards the end of the third millennium was able to sustain several urban settlements. In some of these, about 1950 BC, monumental ‘palace’ complexes appeared. The ‘palaces’, which have large central courtyards and a series of public rooms, also had space for the storage of surplus grain, wine, oil, and other produce. Whoever controlled the ‘palaces’ recorded the goods stored on clay tablets, first in a Cretan hieroglyphic script and later in the island’s own syllabic writing, known to scholars as Linear A. Although the phonetic values of some fifteen Linear A syllables are known, the language in which they are written is as yet undeciphered.

The civilization has been given the name Minoan, after a king, Minos, reputedly the son of Zeus, who, according to later legends, was given Crete to rule. These legends must reflect memories of the Cretan past that passed down the centuries to later Greeks. Minoan civilization was rediscovered when an English archaeologist, Arthur Evans, intrigued by carved seal-stones from the area, began digging at the site of Knossos in 1900, where he soon uncovered the palace buildings. Knossos, situated on rising land not far from the sea, is now known to be an ancient settlement with a history going as far back as the fifth millennium BC. Its status must have depended on its antiquity and even before the ‘palace’ was built it had been a centre for communal feasting. It clearly had a hallowed role and now had become the leading centre of a sophisticated civilization whose craftsmanship was as fine as any in the eastern Mediterranean. Evans exulted over his find. ‘The recent discoveries in Crete have added a new horizon to European civilization—a new standpoint has been at the same time obtained for surveying not only the ancient Classical World of Greece and Rome, but the modern world in which we live.’ Excavators from France and Italy working on other sites, among them Malia and Phaistos, soon showed that this was a civilization that extended across the island.

Evans claimed that the monumental buildings were seats of royalty, assuming that the Minoans had kings, as later legends suggested. The imagination that he breathed into the buildings and the reconstructions that he fostered have defined images of Knossos ever since. (See J. Alexander MacGillivray, *Minotaur: Sir Arthur*

Evans and the Archaeology of the Minoan Myth, London and New York, 2000.) This is why the description ‘palace’ became used of all the major sites and the name has stuck despite the lack of any archaeological (or other) evidence to suggest Minoan kingship. It is only later that there is any record of Minoan leaders (in the Linear B tablets, see below), and early Minoan society was not heavily centralized. Burials suggest, rather, that society was organized around clans or extended families, and excavations in towns surrounding the ‘palaces’ have shown that there were large independent households in control of their own stores. It is the relationship with the central buildings that is difficult to determine. Did a number of elite families control them? Did the arrangement of rooms suggest that the inner rooms were accessible only to a select group while the courtyards were used for more public gatherings? How far did religion play a role in coordinating communal activities? Did an administrative class actually run the ‘palaces’ and record the stored goods there? Were these handed out as offerings to those attending ceremonies? Certainly there is now evidence that goods were brought into the ‘palaces’ from further afield, not made there as was originally believed.

The monumental architecture of the ‘palaces’ and their system of bureaucratic administration are reminiscent of Egypt and the Near East. Yet, even though there is evidence of some influence from the east in imported goods and artistic styles, this was no culture imposed from the outside and the ‘palaces’ cannot be related to foreign models. Cretan society depended for its survival on the well-organized exploitation of the local countryside, something that could only have evolved over a long period of time. It was perhaps this that gave the Cretans their advantage over other communities in the Aegean. The appearances of the ‘palaces’ coincided with the creation of shrines on peak-tops suggesting a network of religious sites and this may well be a sign of the elites establishing control over the countryside by appropriating vantage points.

This was also a society of skilled craftsmen. One style of pottery of this early period (the so-called Old Palace Period, 2000–1600 BC), Kamares ware (from the cave where it was first discovered in the nineteenth century), is among the best ever made in Greece. It is eggshell-thin and covered with flowing abstract designs in white, red, and orange. Quantities were transferred from the central plain of Crete, where it was made, to the ‘palaces’. Many different styles are known affirming this as a creative and lively community. Seals of jasper or rock crystal are engraved with portrayals of animals, birds, and insects. At Malia a hoard of exquisite gold objects was discovered by looters in a cemetery. Most eventually reappeared in the British Museum, although a beautiful pendant of two bees facing each other over a honey cake was found later by excavators on the site.

Designs of ships with sails are found on Minoan seals (earlier Mediterranean ships had used oars) and the Minoan elite appear to have reinforced their status by importing and exporting goods to and from the Aegean and the eastern Mediterranean. Minoan goods in Cyprus show that the island was, as so often in its history, being used as an intermediary stopping place to the east. In the Aegean itself a great deal of evidence for trading has been uncovered at Acrotiri on the island of Santorini,

the ancient Thera. Here there was a flourishing commercial town with between 8,000 and 12,000 inhabitants. In the second half of the seventeenth century BC it underwent a catastrophe as earthquakes and a subsequent volcanic eruption destroyed the town and then covered it in ash. Recent underwater research confirms that this was the greatest volcanic eruption in the world over the past 10,000 years. The legends of a lost Atlantis, a vanished civilization, might well be an echo of what was lost in the catastrophe.

The walls of the houses of Acrotiri, some of which still stand to two or three storeys high with internal floors intact, are covered in frescos and there is certainly Minoan influence here, with lively scenes of animals and flowers. The most famous of the frescos, the 'Ship Fresco', shows the earliest recorded town scenes. Settlements run alongside a shoreline with boats, dolphins, and humans in the sea beyond and crowds assembled on the shore. It is assumed that the houses are those of merchants and the 'Ship Fresco' a record of their overseas contacts. The recent excavations, conducted by Christos Doumas, building on the pioneering early work of Spyridon Marinatos, found the use of Minoan systems of numbering and measurement and growing numbers of imports from Crete, but, so far as pottery was concerned, making up no more than some 1–2 per cent of the total volume. There was also contact with Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean, enough to suggest that Acrotiri was independent of Cretan control and simply exploiting the opportunities that trade offered the city.

About 1600 BC the early Minoan 'palaces' were destroyed. This was once believed to be the direct result of the Thera eruption but pumice from the eruption had already landed on the island and been collected before the destruction. It is now assumed that an earthquake, followed by fires, was the cause, although this and dates of these and later destructions of Cretan palaces are still hotly disputed. The 'palaces' were quickly rebuilt on an even more magnificent scale than before, a clear sign of the underlying prosperity and stability of Minoan society. The walls now have timber posts inserted to give them flexibility against earthquakes. Again the buildings focus on a courtyard, but the public rooms on a first-floor level are magnificent, reached by grand stairways. The best of these at Knossos leads up to a set of 'royal apartments'. One of Evans's finds here was a seat that he considered a throne; it is unique in the period (but possibly a later addition, of the Mycenaean period). New 'palaces' appear for the first time, at Zakros on the eastern end of Crete and at Ayia Triadha, not far from the earlier 'palace' of Phaistos that appears to have been superseded by the newcomer.

On the walls are fine frescos. Those from Knossos are especially exuberant. Some show processions, others women, bare-breasted with flowing hair, others scenes of natural life with an abundance of flowers and animals. The most famous are the scenes of bull leaping—men and women soaring over the horns of charging bulls. The leapers stood on a platform towards which the bulls charged and then launched themselves onto the backs of the bulls, completing a somersault as they landed behind them. There is some evidence that the displays took part within the courtyards but a larger arena with earth foundations is more likely if spectators were to be

accommodated, with the bulls being brought back into the courtyard for sacrifice. (This is certainly some kind of cult activity, and later Greeks recorded the legend of the Minotaur, half-bull and half-man, supposedly the offspring of a liaison between Minos' wife Pasiphae and a bull, which was kept in a labyrinth below the royal palace.)

This New Palace Period (1600–1425 BC) was prosperous and well ordered. There are extensive towns with, at one site, Gournia, houses facing winding cobbled streets. Knossos may have been home to 17,000 people. Again, some houses are more substantial, almost palaces in themselves, suggesting they are the homes of an elite, while in the countryside villas appear. Many are working farms, but others may have been the countryside retreats of the wealthy. The elite sustained fine craftsmanship, beautifully crafted stone vessels, delicate carved seal-stones, and work in gold. The celebrated Harvester Vase, fashioned from hard stone, shows a group of robust farmers marching out to sow their land, their movement and comradeship beautifully captured by the carver. The famous gold cups found at Vaphio in the Peloponnese, but almost certainly from Crete, show bulls being taken into captivity, in one case by brute force, in another through the lure of a female.

An atmosphere of ritual and worship pervades Minoan society but it is difficult to make much sense of it. There is no equivalent of the large temples of Egypt; rather there is a wide range of religious sites, rooms in the 'palaces' set aside for cult worship, sacred caves, and shrines on isolated mountain peaks, the most prominent and continuous at Kato Syme on Mount Dikte in southern Crete. These may have been the focus of 'pilgrimages' and objects found there are often inscribed with a formula (untranslated as yet), in Linear A, together with the name of the shrine concerned. (One interesting finding is that the peak shrines become less important with time and several are abandoned altogether.) Lightweight ritual equipment such as vessels for offerings and figurines of deities give the impression that celebrants were mobile, taking sacred objects from one shrine to another. Leadership, in whatever form it took, must have been expressed through ritual—there is no obvious distinction between political and religious activities. The 'throne' found by Evans on the upper floor of Knossos is close to a lustral basin and may have been used, not by a male ruler as Evans thought, but by a high priestess. There is a strong sense, through frescos and other objects, that women played the prominent role in religious activities; scenes of women and girls gathering crocuses that are then presented as offerings are especially appealing.

Worship, in the form of sacrifices and votive offerings, was directed at a variety of deities, most of them goddesses, with one, shown in some frescos on a throne, supreme over others. The double axe (which originates in Mesopotamia) is a particularly potent symbol, and at Knossos snakes and bulls have some form of ritual significance. The so-called Poppy goddess (with three incised poppy seeds on her head) found at a small rural shrine suggests that opium was used to induce religious ecstasy. Yet in recent years a darker side of Minoan ritual has emerged. In a house in Knossos a mass of children's bones have been found and it appears that the children had been sacrificed, their flesh cut from their bones. Shortly before, at the

mountain shrine of Anemospelia, a sanctuary was uncovered in which was found the body of a youth, bound, on an altar, with a bronze dagger beside him. The sanctuary was preserved because an earthquake had buried it. Was he being sacrificed in a vain attempt to ward off the catastrophe or simply an injured man brought to the sanctuary for treatment?

The Minoans were by now trading throughout the Cyclades (the islands of the southern Aegean) and Near East. The stone they used came from Egypt, the Peloponnese, and the Aegean island of Melos. Copper, made into large ingots, came from the Laurium mines in Attica (later to be more famous as the source of Athens's silver). In Egypt, in a tomb at Thebes, there are paintings of Cretans bringing cloth as tribute, while Minoan pottery is found not only in Egypt but also along the Syro-Palestine coast. In some cases the Minoan presence is more substantial. The frescos of bulls and bull leapers at Tell el-Dab'a on the Nile Delta (see earlier, pp. 60–1) are evidence of a community of Minoan merchants or itinerant artisans there in the early fifteenth century BC. There are three walled city sites in the Aegean—Phylakopi on Melos, Agia Eirene on Kea, and Kolonna on Aegina—where the architecture is reminiscent of that of Cretan towns. Linear A is used, and local potters imitated Cretan styles.

So is it possible to talk of a Minoan empire? There are certainly memories of such an empire in classical writers. The Greek historian Thucydides, for instance, is adamant that the earliest navy was that of king Minos and that it dominated the Cyclades (Book I: 4). At present, however, the evidence is rather of substantial interaction of Minoan traders with local cultures with possibly the settlement of Cretan immigrants on some islands and the coastline of the eastern Mediterranean. There is no evidence in Crete itself of the Minoans as inherently expansionist or imperialist in their ambitions.

Minoan society has had its enthusiastic admirers. The colourful frescos, the apparent joy and sophistication of the people, the sense of a peaceful and ordered society that revelled in the beauties of nature, have been combined to create an image of an idyllic world. In her book *The Dawn of the Gods* (London, 1968) the archaeologist Jacquetta Hawkes argued that Minoan Crete was essentially a 'feminine' society, in contrast to those more 'masculine' cultures of the north. Certainly there is more evidence of a matriarchy here than in other ancient societies but this does not mean that the Minoans were essentially benign. It was a shock in 1981 when the Anemospelia sacrifice was found and a darker side of Minoan life emerged. There is some evidence too that war played a far larger part in Minoan life than was once thought. Large numbers of Cretan swords, dating from 1750 BC, have been found. The 'carefree', peace-loving Minoans may turn out to be no more than a fantasy created in the twentieth century.

The Mycenaeans

Between 1450 and 1425 BC, there was another wave of destruction of the Cretan palaces. The palace at Knossos survived intact but not the areas around it. The rest

were devastated by fire and abandoned for some time. When occupation was resumed a new culture had emerged. Its chamber tombs, those at Sellopoulo near Knossos, for instance, were similar to those of the mainland, and it was using a script, Linear B, which was contemporaneous with Linear A but distinct from it. What had gone on is still disputed. The palaces may have been destroyed by earthquakes followed by fires or as a result of conflict between rival centres. At some point invaders entered the island, either as conquerors or appropriators of the ruined palaces. The fact that Kommos, the major harbour in southern Crete, was not damaged might suggest destruction of the palaces by the invaders after a landing there. Knossos was probably used as a base by the newcomers but was to be itself destroyed at a later date, sometime between 1400 and 1200. The invaders were the Mycenaeans, the first known civilization of mainland Greece.

It is an exhilarating experience to visit the citadel of Mycenae in the Greek Peloponnese today, especially if one arrives early, before other visitors, when the deserted ruins appear suddenly on the hillside. Well inland from the sea in a landscape that does not seem especially fertile, it seems an unlikely site for the city ‘rich in gold’ as described by Homer in the eighth century BC. Yet gold there was. In 1876 the German merchant turned archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann, digging inside the massive stone walls of the citadel, uncovered a circle of stone slabs within which were six shaft graves (now known as Grave Circle A). The graves, deep rectangular pits some of which contained several burials, were filled with an array of rich grave goods, including gold cups, haunting face masks, and a mass of weapons. They still dazzle the visitor to the Mycenaean rooms of the National Museum of Athens. Schliemann, who had immersed himself in the epics of Homer with their tales of the great Trojan War, was convinced that Mycenae was the capital of those Greeks who had sailed off to Troy and that he had found no less than the grave and funeral mask of Agamemnon, their leader.

In fact the graves were much earlier than any conceivable date for the Trojan War. They, and an earlier, less rich, set of shaft graves (only discovered in 1951, the so-called Grave Circle B), dated from perhaps as early as 1650 and had been used and reused until about 1500 BC. At first they seemed so distinct culturally from what had gone before that it was assumed that they were the work of newcomers to Greece. However, there are earlier stone tombs that are structurally similar to the chambers of the shaft graves, while recent work on the pottery associated with the tombs has shown that it is a direct continuation of earlier styles. There is now no doubt that Mycenaean civilization developed directly from what had gone before. What is hard to explain is why this opulence developed so suddenly and unexpectedly in areas that had no ports and no great agricultural resources.

The answer seems to lie in the consolidation of elites. The shaft tombs and *tholos* tombs, round tombs with domed chambers found in Messenia, suggest families distancing themselves from the mass of population and perpetuating themselves as kinship groups through their own segregated tombs. The Mycenaean graves contain the remains of men, women, and children and the adults were healthy and robust, with an average age at death of 38. In physical terms these were certainly an

elite and the reuse of tombs show that they expected to pass power down the generations. One of the discoveries in Grace Circle A is the gold covering for a child who must already have been marked out for high status before his or her early death.

There were several parts of Greece where Mycenaean settlements sprang up: the Argive plain in the eastern Peloponnese, which included Mycenae, Messenia in the western Peloponnese, and Attica and Boeotia on the Greek mainland. In Boeotia the citadels of Gla, Orchomenos, and, above all, thanks to a spate of recent excavations under the modern town, Thebes, are becoming better known and are challenging the perception that the Peloponnese was the core of Mycenaean civilization. The emergence of these settlements suggests that local leaders were exploiting their land more effectively in the hope that a surplus of the enduring local staples of the Greek mainland, olive oil, wine, wool, flax, and hides, could be squeezed out and then used for exchange in overseas trade for status symbols. Culturally the Mycenaeans were much less sophisticated than the Minoans but already before 1600 some sites had begun importing Minoan goods and craftsmen and even using their styles for inspiration.

Wider interaction with the Mediterranean may have stemmed from the Mycenaean control of copper, silver, and lead mines at Laurion in Attica. Metal analysis now shows that copper and silver found at Mycenae originated at Laurion but, even more tellingly, that the Minoans were importing Laurion copper. As their confidence and demands grew the Mycenaeans searched after further resources in the Aegean; copper and tin for bronze weapons, gold and silver for the finer metalwork, amber from northern Europe, lapis lazuli and dyes from the east. The Minoans may have been used as middlemen. Expansion was underpinned by a readiness to glorify war, clearly another means for the elite to achieve status. The famous bronze cuirass found at Dendra, in the eastern Peloponnese, seems designed for one to one combat on the model of the Homeric hero. Weapons found in the shaft graves include short swords suitable for thrusting and cutting in close combat that show signs of having been used in battle. One of the frescos from Acrotiri depicts what appear to be well-organized groups of Mycenaean soldiers. (A tell-tale sign is helmets adorned with boar tusks, as have actually been found in Mycenaean tombs.) These may have been mercenaries provided to rival Aegean cities by opportunistic Mycenaean leaders.

By the fifteenth century a Mycenaean presence was apparent throughout the eastern Mediterranean. The mercenaries may have become an expansionist force in their own right as it was now that Crete was overrun and its culture absorbed. There was the diffusion of Mycenaean artefacts, especially pottery, throughout the Cyclades, and a Mycenaean settlement with its own defensive walls has been found on the Asian mainland at Miletus. At Phylakopi on the island of Melos a community already rich in Minoan culture was fortified by the Mycenaeans. Trading routes, plotted as a result of finds of Mycenaean pottery, ran as far west as Sardinia, Italy, and Malta and as far east as the Levantine coast (ninety known sites with Mycenaean pottery most of them near the coast) and Egypt. There was a major increase in trade with Cyprus after 1400. Twenty sites in Egypt, some far up the Nile, have

produced Mycenaean pottery; figures of warriors on a papyrus from Tell el-Amarna might represent Mycenaean mercenaries. Yet there is no mention in the Linear B tablets of a Mycenaean merchant class and it may be that it was seafarers from the eastern Mediterranean that continued to do much of the carrying.

By the fourteenth century the Mycenaeans had themselves become fine craftsmen, particularly in bronze and ivory but also in gold and silver. They were also accomplished builders. From the fifteenth century monumental *tholos* tombs were pervasive—nine remain at Mycenae alone. The most spectacular of these is ‘the Treasury of Atreus’, attributed by Schliemann to Atreus, in legend the founding king of Mycenae and father of the Homeric Agamemnon. It is now dated to c.1350 BC. A *dromos* or entrance passage thirty-six metres long leads to the great entrance door one of whose lintels alone weighs a hundred tonnes. The stress is lessened by incorporating a triangular opening above the lintel. Inside the domed roof rises to thirteen metres and there is a separate burial chamber off the main room.

Even before they came directly into contact with Crete, the Mycenaeans must have been aware of the existence of Linear A script. By about 1400 they were writing their own language in a similar syllabic script, known to scholars as Linear B—in fact the two scripts have been called ‘cousins’. What this language was remained unclear for many years but the assumption was that it was pre-Greek. The collection and ordering of the tablets, after a large collection was uncovered inside the palace at Pylos in the south-west Peloponnese in 1939, was intensive. Then in 1952, in one of the more important archaeological achievements of the century, a young architect, Michael Ventris, who had had an enthusiasm for languages and cryptography since he was a boy, made a stunning proposal. He had deciphered the values of several syllables and had re-created words that appeared close to those of the earliest surviving Greek texts, those of Homer’s epics. Among them were ‘shepherd’, ‘bronzesmith’, and ‘goldsmith’ and *polo* for foals, the same as in classical Greek. Not everyone was convinced, but the next year a new batch of Linear B tablets emerged from Pylos. One of them was a list of furniture. Beside a vessel with three supports were Linear B syllables reading, according to Ventris’s theory, TI-RI-PO. Earlier in the text two similar vessels had an adjoining text reading TI-RI-PO-DE. The Homeric Greek for a single tripod and a pair of tripods corresponded exactly. By now there were very few doubters—although when one set of academic diehards was confronted by a new batch of tablets from Pylos that confirmed Ventris’s decipherment, they claimed they had been deliberately forged to support his claim! (The story is well told by John Chadwick in his *The Decipherment of Linear B*, Cambridge and New York, 1990. See also Margalit Fox, *The Riddle of the Labyrinth*, New York, 2013.)

Scholars were enthusiastic to find that Greek had been spoken so early, 500 years before the first Homeric text. As the Linear B tablets, particularly those of the large batch from Pylos, were deciphered, new evidence for the antiquity of Greek religion appeared. Zeus was already known to have roots deep in Indo-European cultures, but there were now the first mentions of other Greek gods and goddesses—Aphrodite, Ares, the god of war, Apollo, and Poseidon. At Pylos itself the tablets suggest that Poseidon was the presiding god, and it is particularly fascinating to find Homer,

several centuries later, talking of the townsmen of Pylos offering sacrifices of black bulls to him. The goddess Potnia, literally ‘she who has power’, is listed in one Linear B tablet as the Potnia of Athana (*sic*), and reappears in the *Iliad* as ‘the Athenian Potnia’, an early linking of Athens to her patron goddess. A recent, and totally unexpected, find has been the god Dionysus, as the recipient of an offering of honey at a sanctuary of Zeus at Chania and again identified with an altar at Pylos, here in the countryside.

The Linear B tablets make it clear that there were regular festivals linked to the agricultural year for which offerings of animals, wine, and cheese were brought to sustain communal feasting. There is increasing evidence of the importance of the funeral as a ceremony in Mycenaean society. Surviving fragments of frescos, painted vases, and *larnakes*, the pottery boxes in which human ashes were buried, show women with the hair shorn and their faces scarred accompanying the bier that was drawn by horses. Communal feasting took place at tombs and the horses appear to have been sacrificed. The ordinary members of the community were buried in chamber tombs cut into the rocks. A survey at Mycenae has identified twenty-seven different cemetery sites and some 250 tombs—these were family tombs, sometimes with as many as twenty bodies inside. Ancestors were given enduring respect by their descendants.

Independent palaces and citadels, Mycenae, Tiryns, Athens, and Pylos among them, lorded it over their local territory. (Schliemann was wrong to see Mycenae as a capital of Greece, although it may have been first among equals.) Palaces centred on a hall, the *megaron*, with a central hearth, a throne on the side wall, and an entrance vestibule graced by columns. There were domestic rooms around it, at Pylos even a bathroom with built-in bath. The walls, like those of the Minoan ‘palaces’, were decorated with frescos. Who ruled here? The Linear B tablets talk of a *wanax*, a figure unknown in Minoan society, with authority over a defined territory. The tablets suggest that the *wanax* appointed officials and carried out religious rituals. At Pylos, in the western Peloponnese, a tradition going back to the Greek traveller Pausanias in the second century AD identified the area as the home of Homer’s hero, Nestor, and to this day the palace at Pylos is referred to as his. Homer’s Nestor presides over the sacrifice of bulls. Mycenae had a cult centre of several rooms approached from the palace through a frescoed processional way, so linking ruler and ritual. Cult images and figurines have been found there as well as altars for offerings.

Another official, the *lawagetas*, oversaw groups of people. These included rowers and warriors so he may have been a state general and a second *megaron* found in some palaces may have been his audience room. At Mycenae the palace also included workshops for artisans. The pottery of the Mycenaeans was especially fine: stirrup jars, for the transport of olive oil, drinking cups, and *pithoi* for storage are common shapes with designs adapted from Minoan art but given an exuberance of their own, notably in the use of sprawling octopuses, rosettes and whorls, and some primitive figure scenes, of warriors (the famous vase from Mycenae shows marching soldiers) and sailors on board ship. On Mycenaean seals it

is telling that the nature themes of the Minoans were rejected in favour of those showing prestige items such as chariots and even bulls leaping as if the rough up-coming Mycenaean chieftains needed to appropriate the symbols of the civilization they were supplanting. Another appropriation was the Minoan double axe, itself a symbol of authority.

Towns grew up around the citadels. Mycenae's may have had 6,500 inhabitants at its height. At Pylos urban sprawl stretched along the neighbouring Englianos Ridge for a kilometre. The rulers of each centre controlled trade and industrial production through an impressive bureaucracy. Several sites name officials whose title translates as 'Collector' and who had privileged access to resources. At Pylos there are records of the issue of bronze to the local smiths and the supervision of huge flocks of sheep by 'Collectors'. This was at a time when agriculture, especially the cultivation of olives, was booming. Damming and draining improved access to water, always essential in a parched landscape such as Greece. The various processes of textile manufacture appear to have been under the Collectors' control and in Crete there are detailed accounts of the gathering in of wool from some 600 different flocks. The wool was then allocated to women workers for production and dyeing. Each independent flock owner paid dues in the shape of wool to the centre and similarly some 775 tonnes of grain are recorded as being sent to Knossos as 'tax' from one harvest alone. One Collector at Knossos seems to have been responsible for the supervision of perfumed oil. The centres certainly had trading links with each other (one text at Mycenae records cloth bound for Thebes) and the use of similar names for officials at different sites suggests a shared political economy. The inter-state contacts may have extended to joint raids into the Aegean and beyond as Homer's description of Agamemnon as leader of a band of hero chieftains each with his own followers suggests.

Yet the aggressive expansionism of the Mycenaean warlords was now being challenged. In the thirteenth century the fortifications of the Mycenaean centres became more massive. Unworked limestone was extracted in rough blocks from local quarries and levered into place to make formidable walls. At Gla, in Boeotia, there is a particularly extensive set but those at Mycenae and Tiryns also tower above the onlooker. In Mycenae the citadel is entered through the celebrated Lion Gate, in which two lions flanking a column perch upon a massive lintel. This suggests that the chieftains were competing in the display of their wealth and authority but it soon becomes clear that defence is also becoming a priority. So the walls at Mycenae and Tiryns are extended to enclose more of the community (at Mycenae the grave shafts are considered important enough to be included within the new walls), cisterns and storage chambers are incorporated, and elaborate entrance passages are designed to cut off and eliminate intruders. By 1200 sally ports are added at Mycenae, allowing the defenders to rush out into the midst of aggressors. A defensive wall was built across the Isthmus of Corinth, probably as a protection against invasion from the north. Even Pylos, where the palace has a domestic atmosphere very different from that of the typical Mycenaean stronghold, was rebuilt to make it more defensible.

The evidence suggests that this was a time of rising tension probably affecting the Mediterranean area as a whole. It has proved impossible to disentangle the sequence of events between 1200 and 1100. Earthquakes, followed by fires, were responsible for the collapse of some palaces in the eastern Peloponnese but the destruction of cities did not take place simultaneously. Some centres such as Athens, remained largely unscathed (according to the limited evidence surviving from a site on which there has been continuous rebuilding), others were destroyed, then reoccupied, then destroyed again. Pylos came under attack about 1180. The Linear B tablets, preserved by the heat of the fire which burned the palace, record hurried preparations for defence with, according to one interpretation, watchers sent to the coasts, bronze gathered in from the temples, and levies of gold. There are even hints that human sacrifices were carried out to appease the gods. It was of little use. The palace was destroyed completely.

It has been argued that there was a Mycenaean revival in the mid-twelfth century that was then snuffed out by further onslaughts. In some cases refugees carried their culture to other sites (such as Lefkandi on the island of Euboea and, possibly, recent excavations suggest, to the Chalcidice peninsula) and preserved it intact. In Tiryns there was even a revival of the settlement in the twelfth century, suggesting that new elite families had replaced the old. However, Mycenaean civilization had depended on a combination of strong and ordered leadership and administrative efficiency. By 1100 BC this had gone. With it disappeared literacy, fresco painting, stone building, and craftwork in gold and silver. William MacDonald's survey of Messenia and southern Elis, in the Greek Peloponnese, in the 1960s, showed 195 sites active until about 1200 and only 16 afterwards.

The causes of the collapse of Mycenaean civilization have been hotly debated. The traditional view that it was the result of the marauding 'Sea Peoples' now appears to be simplistic in that the 'Sea Peoples' may themselves have been casualties of the breakdown rather than its instigators. The invaders of the Egyptian coastline are not necessarily the same peoples as those recorded threatening Pylos from the sea. There is increasing support for the idea that the economies of the Mycenaean centres became simply too complex, unable to sustain their prosperity as their populations rose. As resources became scarce, the Mycenaeans may have turned on each other, leading to a massive 'systems collapse', a civil war in which all ultimately lost out.

There is also a legend, preserved by the later Greeks, that Mycenaean civilization had been destroyed by invaders from the north-west, the Dorians. There is little archaeological evidence to support this invasion, though recently some archaeologists have suggested that handmade burnished pottery found on several twelfth-century sites, the so-called 'Barbarian Ware', may be that of incomers from the north. In short, there is continuing controversy over whether the reduced and impoverished communities of the twelfth and eleventh centuries were newcomers or the old populations adapting to new circumstances, although scholarship tends, in the present state of archaeological evidence, towards the latter view.

The collapse of Mycenaean civilization was followed by what scholars have traditionally called a Dark Age, from 1100 BC until the emergence of a new Greek world after 800. As with many other Dark Ages, however, the Greek Dark Age has proved vulnerable to the work of archaeologists, who are gradually finding evidence that life was, perhaps, not quite so shadowy as was once assumed. Without doubt, however, the unity of the Mycenaean world had been shattered. What did remain among the dispersed populations of the old Mycenaean centres and in the depopulated countryside was life carried on according to old traditions but at a much lower level.

Postscript: The Chronology of the Aegean Bronze Age

In my text I have deliberately avoided the many problems associated with providing a chronology for the Aegean Bronze Age, the 2,000 years from 3100 BC to the coming of iron in c.1100. The chronology involves plotting the transitions between one culture and another, matching these across the Aegean, Crete, and mainland Greece and establishing a system for dating each transition. So the so-called period Late Minoan IB in Crete roughly corresponds with Late Helladic IIA on mainland Greece for the dates 1635/1625 to 1480/1470 BC. The terminology which describes each period has become ever more intricate and yet so deeply embedded that it is hard to break out of it and to start again. I would recommend that beginners start with a chapter such as Stuart Manning's 'Chronology and Terminology' in Eric Cline (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Bronze Age Aegean* (Oxford, 2010) to alert them to the issues. However cumbersome the system has become, as new sites are discovered and more sophisticated ways of assessing cultural change evolve, advanced students are still destined to master the tables of periods and boundaries and know their shortcomings if they wish to proceed to in-depth studies of the civilizations of the Aegean Bronze Age!

The Migrations

It was the fifth-century Greek historian Herodotus who defined the Greeks as united by their common culture, religion, language, and customs. He was writing at a time when the Persian invasions had highlighted a shared sense of identity against the outsiders and he may have given the impression of Greek culture as more uniform than it was. In fact, it was *within* its shared characteristics that the Greeks were able to sustain and even encourage diversity. This was already clear as early as the eighth century. The Greeks had none of the wealth of the civilizations of the Near East but they proved opportunistic and flexible at a time when most of these civilizations were in disarray, with the result that they created one of the more original, robust, and intellectually vital cultures that the world has known. (Two excellent survey books covering this period up to 479 BC, and so the contents of Chapters 9 to 12, are Jonathan Hall, *A History of the Archaic Greek World, ca.1200–479 B.C.E.*, Malden, Mass., and Oxford, 2007, and Robin Osborne, *Greece in the Making, 1200–479 BC*, 2nd edition, London and New York, 2009.)

The collapse of Mycenaean civilization led to a scattering of peoples across Greece and the Aegean. There are legends of widespread migrations of Greeks from the mainland eastwards, and maps of the different but mutually intelligible Greek dialects spoken in a later age help to reconstruct what may have happened. In remote areas, the mountains of Arcadia and Cyprus, the dialect known to scholars as Arcado-Cypriot appears to be the survival of Mycenaean Greek. In Cyprus the dialect must have been brought there by refugees from the turmoil of the twelfth century. In the Peloponnese generally, the old centre of the Mycenaean world, the Doric dialect is supreme. The legends that the Dorians came from the north to overthrow the citadels of Mycenaean Greece were deeply rooted in later Greek mythology, and the sense that the Dorians were different lingered for centuries. There is little archaeological evidence to explain their appearance and their origins in the Peloponnese remain obscure. The Doric dialect is later found in Crete and across the southern Aegean from there as far as Rhodes and the south-western tip of Asia Minor.

Another distinct dialect is the Ionic. It appears first north-east of the Peloponnese in Attica and the adjoining island of Euboea. The Athenians' own tradition was that the area remained largely unscathed by the chaos of the twelfth century, but,

even if there is no sign of widespread destruction, there is archaeological evidence of cultural change, in burial customs, with cremation rather than inhumation, and styles of pottery. Iron makes its appearance. In the tenth century there appears to have been a migration of Ionic speakers to Asia Minor, where they colonized the central part of the coast, a region later known as Ionia. From the plains of Boeotia and Thessaly another dialect, Aeolic, appears to have spread to the northern coastline of Asia Minor. The end result of these migrations was an Aegean surrounded by Greek settlements whose relationships with each other must have been maintained by the criss-crossing of the sea by traders, craftsmen, and wandering poets.

One of the most important developments was the emergence of weapons in iron rather than bronze, so marking, for historians, the transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age. This may have been because the sources of tin were cut off or because the collapse of trading networks saw the end of those ruling elites who had controlled trade in tin. (Copper, the other ingredient in bronze, remained available to the Greeks from Cyprus.) If trade in tin had broken down, then it would have been comparatively easy for the Greeks to have found iron ore in Greece itself but it involved a technological breakthrough to smelt it and so create what proved to be a tougher and more versatile metal than bronze. Iron eventually replaced bronze for weapons and everyday implements as it had already done further east. (The earliest iron technology is to be found in Anatolia and then developed in the twelfth and eleventh centuries in northern Syria and 'was used to full advantage by the Assyrians, see earlier, p. 94.)

The conventional view of a 'Dark Age' that was comparatively stagnant has been challenged in recent years by more sophisticated excavation of sites. The most prominent is Lefkandi, a Greek settlement that flourished on the coast of Euboea, so overlooking the Greek mainland. It is an ancient site with remains going back to 2000 BC. For a brief period in the twelfth century it was deserted, but by 1100 it was reoccupied, and the community remained until about 825 BC when the settlement went into decline. Lefkandi's wealth, seen in the gold of its burials, came from trade with the east, with Cyprus and the Phoenicians on the Levantine coast.

One of the most unexpected finds at Lefkandi has been the burial of a 'hero', a local leader, cremated, as was now common, alongside his wife, who was bedecked in gold. They were enclosed in a large apsidal building that was later covered by a mound. The burial is dated to between 1000 and 950 BC and is remarkable for including the skeletons of a team of four horses. Such teams (they are known as *quadrigae* (singular *quadriga*)) were always a status symbol as the horses ran alongside each other but the outer two were always trace horses with no pulling power. In effect they were there to show off the opulence of their owners.

The *quadriga* persisted as a status symbol throughout classical history. When Greek gods, heroes, including those of Homer, or aristocrats are portrayed in chariots these normally have four horses. The Greek games, which, as we shall see, were essentially an aristocratic enterprise, had four-horse chariot races and these were transferred, through the Etruscans, to Rome, where they became a major entertainment in the Circus. Victorious Roman generals celebrated their

triumphs in Rome in *quadrigae* and emperors presented themselves in the same way in bronze *quadrigae* on triumphal arches. Only one full-scale team survives, that now on show in St Mark's Basilica, Venice. It probably dates from the second or third century AD.

Lefkandi remains almost unique, perhaps a rare settlement where the earlier age of Mycenaean war chieftains lingered on, but other sites are being discovered. The German Archaeological Institute's excavations at Kalapodi, in Phocis in central Greece, have uncovered a Mycenaean sanctuary that continued to flourish through these 'Dark Age' centuries as the centre of a festival dedicated to the consumption of meat, both domestic and wild, and plants. A new terrace of c.950 appears to have acted as an arena for worshippers and a display area for votive offerings. Here the votives were usually in metal, a sign that metalworking was becoming commonplace. On Crete a number of new settlements in the countryside flourished. Typically they used well-protected positions from which to exploit the fertile land but maintained access to the sea so, while mainland Greece was still isolated, they helped stimulate trading networks.

Trade was also stimulated by the expansion of the Phoenicians, who, as was suggested in Chapter 6, may have needed to trade to accumulate tribute for their Assyrian overlords. Their presence in the west is found from the late tenth century. From about 850 onwards Greek traders from the island of Euboea are found joining in. By 825 there is permanent Greek influence (whether from a Greek community living there, or from Levantine traders with Greek contacts, is disputed) at the trading port of al-Mina at the mouth of the Orontes river on the northern coast of the Levant. The east provided luxury goods, textiles, carved objects in ivory, or cast ones in precious metals, as well as iron ore and other metals. The revival in trade can only be explained by a growth in prosperity in Greece and the Aegean itself as conditions stabilized and a surplus of agricultural wealth once again became available. The Greeks may have shipped slaves, captured from the north, to the east in return for their imported luxuries. The most important import of all, picked up probably from the Phoenicians themselves in their homeland in the ninth or early eighth century, was the alphabet (see earlier, p. 32, and below, for the development of the alphabet).

The Eighth-Century 'Renaissance'

As more archaeological evidence emerges for activity between 1100 and 800, the traditional account that a 'Renaissance' in the eighth century was sudden and unexpected may be challenged. Yet there remains compelling evidence that mainland Greece now went through a period of rapid social, economic, and cultural change. It appears that the climate became wetter and colder in the southern Mediterranean between 850 and 750 making farming more productive. At one level the change is seen in a large rise of population, recorded in Attica, for instance, by an increase in the number of graves (although this may have been due to allowing formal burial

for a greater proportion of the community). Athens may have had 1,500 inhabitants in 1000 BC; by 700 an estimate is 5,000. Land that had been uncultivated since the twelfth century was now being reoccupied. With rising prosperity came a revival in metalworking. An increase in shipbuilding reflects renewed and growing links with the outside world. Greek pottery from the ninth century is seldom found outside Greece. By the eighth century it is widespread in the Mediterranean. Examples have been found at over eighty sites.

In the early Dark Age there had been few resources with which to sustain fine craftsmanship. Weaving may have been important but all traces of cloth have vanished. Pottery, however, has survived. The finest of the period comes from Athens and the surrounding plains of Attica. In the so-called Protogeometric age, 1050–900 BC, the lingering influence of Mycenaean models disappears as Athenian pots suddenly become grander. The diameter of the typical vase increases and decoration becomes ordered and less makeshift. The neck of the vase is decorated with semi-circles drawn with compasses to ensure uniformity. This style spread to some but not to all parts of Greece. In the Geometric age, from around 900, and again initiated by Athens, rectilinear decoration becomes dominant (possibly borrowing from textile designs). The painter becomes obsessed with the ordering of space to such an extent that by the middle of the ninth century many pots are covered with geometrical designs, zigzags, swastikas, and borders in an endless variety of motifs. Again the style spreads to regional workshops, but many areas of the Aegean, including Euboea and the Cyclades, are largely untouched by it. What is almost completely missing, however, is any representation of figures. An exception is, typically, from Lefkandi. Here a centaur from the tenth or ninth century has been found, an astonishingly early representation of the man-horse beast that is so common in later Greek art.

It is only in the mid-eighth century that figures appear again on pottery, and then only in one context, the large funerary pots found in the Dipylon Gate cemetery at Athens. In the works of the so-called Dipylon master, who may have been working as early as 770, figures are crammed in between the decorative motifs. There may be as many as a hundred on a single pot. They appear only in scenes connected with death. There are mourners surrounding a body on a bier or warriors fighting in battles on land or sea. The pots themselves are large, over a metre and a half tall. They are funerary memorials in which aristocratic families are using the only monumental art form locally available to glorify their exploits. Although the work of the Dipylon master is still set within the conventions of the Geometric period (the figures are stylized and arranged symmetrically), a crucial step forward had been taken and the inspiration seems to have been the cultures of the east where friezes of figures and animals are found in a variety of contexts, including metalwork. Here is the birth of one of the major art forms of Greece, the dynamic narrative of real or mythical events on fine pottery. The Dipylon master remained a pioneer and his style vanished in about 725. However, human forms reappear on pottery, and this time remain there, from about 700 onwards. (The link between this art and the social rituals of the period has now been made by

Susan Langdon in *Art and Identity in Dark Age Greece, 1100–700 B.C.E.*, Cambridge and New York, 2008.)

Equally important in this period was the arrival of literacy in Greece. Linear B, used for the first written Greek texts, had been written in syllables. Over eighty different ones were needed. In the eastern Mediterranean in the fifteenth century, on the other hand, alphabets had begun emerging within the Semitic cultures of the Levant (see p. 32). Somewhere in the eighth century a Greek community picked up the Phoenician alphabet and sponsored the rebirth of Greek literacy. This may have been at Al-Mina or another mainland site, Rhodes, Cyprus, or Crete in the eastern Mediterranean, or the Euboean trading centre at Pithecoussai on the island of Ischia where Greeks and Phoenicians were mingling with Etruscans and Sardinians. (I was shown an early eighth-century Greek graffito on a shard of pottery when I visited the site in 1966!) There is also the new evidence from Methone, see below, p. 155.

Some uses of literacy are obvious, especially for a society that is becoming increasingly mobile: the marking of possessions with a personal name, the recording of commercial transactions, or the listing of goods. For all these needs a consonantal alphabet is sufficient. The range of words used is limited and fluency of speech is not required. However, in a transformation of crucial significance, the Greeks adopted some of the Phoenician consonants for which they had no use to serve as vowels. ‘Ld’ might now become ‘lad’, ‘led’, ‘lid’, ‘lod’, or ‘lud’. The range of sounds that could be represented in writing expanded enormously and could represent any pattern of speech. The examples of seventh-century writing that survive (over 150 examples have been found in Athens alone) show that very soon writing was being used in a variety of contexts, as a mark of ownership, for public inscriptions, in dedications at shrines (overall the most common use), and as ‘captions’ on painted pots. At some shrines writing seems to have been added to pieces of pottery offered to the gods, as if it was seen to have some sacred quality in itself. It also seems that writing, when inscribed on a gravestone, for instance, was used as a means of perpetuating the memory of an individual.

Yet one of the most important uses of writing was to record poetry and for this the added vowels were essential. One of the very earliest inscriptions in Greek, found on a vase originating from Rhodes at the Greek trading-post at Pithekoussai, consists of three lines of verse describing the vase as belonging to Nestor and promising sexual desire to whoever drinks from it. It dates from about 720. Nestor is a Homeric hero, and it is possible that the two great epic poems ascribed to the poet Homer, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, were by this time known to the inscriber. Whether they had been actually written down by this date is unknown although it has been argued by Barry Powell (*Homer and the Origins of the Greek Alphabet*, Cambridge, 1991) that the alphabet was adopted specifically for this task. Powell’s thesis has been much debated but the Greek communities of the eighth century certainly wished to record these great epics in permanent form. It is one of the great moments in world literature.

Homer

It is now generally agreed that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* evolved over many centuries, originally as songs. Wandering around the homesteads and halls of the Greek world were the singers, men of prodigious memories who had mastered the art of communication through verse. Research in the Balkans, notably in the early part of the last century by the American scholar Milman Parry, has shown how formidable the skills of such singers could be and how sophisticated their techniques. One Bosnian Muslim was found to have held in his mind twice as many lines as the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* combined. In fact, researchers exploring Asian and African epic verse have found that the Homeric epics are comparatively short in comparison. The singers did not simply rely on memory. Serial recordings of the survivors of this tradition show they have an extraordinary ability to improvise, never repeating the stories in the same way, and continually refashioning their themes.

The singer may draw on folk memories but his song will also be shaped by his audiences. His living depends on his ability to maintain their interest hour after hour by the firelight, possibly night after night. His instinct will be to sense their needs and improvise accordingly. In a number of different cultures the predominant need has been to hear of the founding heroes of the nation. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* from Sumeria, the *Song of Roland* and other epics set at the time of Charlemagne, the legends of Arthur and his knights belong to the same tradition as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The first written version often emerges hundreds of years after the events it claims to describe, by which time its links with actual historical events have become tenuous. (Research on the *Song of Roland*, first written down about AD 1150, has shown it to be a massive distortion of the eighth-century events it claims to record.) So one must imagine the singer, 'Homer', as presenting just part of his repertoire in what survives and in a version that is one of many possibilities. This helps explain the immediacy of the epics.

What Parry demonstrated was how the internal consistency and structure of each song solidified with time. The singer relied heavily on a number of formulas, such as 'swift-footed Achilles', or full lines—'When early-born rosy-fingered dawn appeared'—which fit the metre and can be used again and again, particularly when the singer needs a pause to reflect on the next development in his plot. What controlled the composition was the need to maintain the rhythm and power of the verse, and the words chosen by the poet to fill gaps between the formulas were those that fitted the metre rather than those that necessarily made good sense. The poet was concerned above all to maintain an emotional impact through the steady, almost ceremonial, intonation of the verse, rather than to tell a coherent story.

As a result, the recitations of the epics must have been events full of emotional charge that it is difficult for a modern audience to re-create. Peter Brook, the British theatre director who has specialized in taking his productions into traditional cultures worldwide, describes a visit of his troupe to remote villages in Iran in 1970. Here the tradition of Ta'azieh still survived. The Ta'azieh are mystery plays that deal with the martyrdom of the early Islamic prophets. The play watched by Brook was

led by a musician, and as he began his chant Brook records, ‘His emotion was in no way his own. It was as though we heard his father’s voice, and his father’s father’s and so back. He stood there, legs apart, powerfully, totally convinced of his function and he as the incarnation of that figure who for our theatre is always the most elusive one of all, the hero.’ As the action developed and the leading character walked off to what the audience already knew would be his death, the watching villagers became drawn in. ‘I saw lips trembling, hands and handkerchief stuck in mouths, faces wrought with paroxysms of grief. First the very old men and women, then the children and the young men on bicycles all sobbed freely.’ What Brook goes on to call ‘the inner echo’ has been found when a community identifies totally with its traditions. The same thing may have happened to the listeners of Dark Age Greece.

As an epic reaches coherence, possibly after centuries of fluid development, there may be a moment when it becomes part of the cultural heritage of the community, and then there is a strong impulse to preserve it in a more stable form for future generations. At some point a final author or authors, ‘Homer’, put the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* into a coherent form, adding connecting passages and improving overall consistency. The identity of Homer is still unknown and probably will remain so. The leading scholar of the literature of this period, M. L. West, argues that the name itself is a later construction but that a single poet worked on the *Iliad* over a lifetime and a different author was responsible for the *Odyssey*. In the original tradition, Homer is a native of the island of Chios or the nearby coastal town of Smyrna, but more recently it has been suggested that the Ionic dialect that predominates in the final version of the poems is the native one of western Ionia, possibly the island of Euboea, rather than of the settlements of the eastern Aegean. Embedded in the verse are words and formulas some scholars date back to Mycenaean times and there are possibly even links to the epics of the Near East, another theme explored in detail by M. L. West (see his *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth*, Oxford and New York, 1999). It remains the convention to use the name ‘Homer’ to describe the ‘author’ of the two epics. (For further studies of Homer see Jasper Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death*, Oxford, 1980, and more recently R. Fowler (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, Cambridge, 2004.)

Why was there a desire to record the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in writing? The singers moved in the world of the aristocratic chieftain and his retinue, a world described in the *Odyssey* itself where Odysseus seeks hospitality in the hall of the king of the Phaeacians. It is possible that aristocrats, feeling their own traditions under threat in the fast-changing world of the eighth century, were the prime movers in guarding their heritage through writing it down. The development of vowels made the whole process much easier.

The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* have very different themes but they are episodes of a common story, an expedition by Greeks (‘Achaean’ Homer calls them) overseas to the city of Troy in pursuit of the beautiful Helen, wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta, who has been carried off by Paris, a son of king Priam of Troy. It takes ten years of battle, siege, and cunning before Troy falls, leaving the surviving Greek heroes free at last

to make their way homewards to their long-missed wives and families. (Moses Finley's *The World of Odysseus*, new edition, 2002, New York, first published in 1954, remains a classic introduction to this world.)

Tradition sets the Trojan War in Mycenaean times, long before the eighth or seventh centuries when the poems were first written down. Such an expedition by a group of Mycenaean chieftains and their men to the coast of Asia Minor ties in well with the aggressive nature of Mycenaean expansion. Troy was a prosperous settlement on the coast just south of the entrance to the Black Sea, access to which it may have controlled, and it was certainly a potential target for greedy Greek warriors. There is even evidence of destructions of the city at the time of greatest Mycenaean expansion in the fifteenth century and later in the twelfth. (See Barry Strauss, *The Trojan War*, New York and London, 2007, for a recent account of the background evidence.)

However, there is no evidence to link the Mycenaeans with these destructions (one of which was almost certainly due to an earthquake). It is more likely that the core of the epics preserves more general memories of the Mycenaean age when men fought far from home and raids and sieges were part of everyday life. A great deal of material was added very much later than Mycenaean times. The Lelantine war between rival Greek cities of Euboea split the Greek world in the later part of the eighth century (see p. 156) and the experience, possibly fresh in the mind of Homer and his audiences, could well have been woven in with the earlier folk memories. If the need to create emotional impact is what defines the form of the epics, then the background of Homeric society does not have to be an accurate portrayal of any period but a pastiche which is continually developed with Bronze Age memories existing alongside contemporary experience.

The world Homer portrays in the *Iliad* is one of violence, often presented in a horrifying form. The bulk of the poem is taken up with the continuous ebb and flow of battle between Greeks and Trojans before the walls of Troy. The epic begins with the anger of Achilles, one of the Greek hero warriors. He has been forced by the leader of the Greeks, Agamemnon, to surrender a girl won as a prize. The real question is honour and *timē*, 'prestige'. The proud Achilles feels humiliated by the way he has been ordered about by a man whose authority he regards as less than supreme. Homer immediately confronts the reader, or listener, with the validity of anger and stubbornness displayed against authority in a context when lives can all too easily be lost. And lost they are as Homer describes how warrior after warrior is annihilated in the ensuing skirmishes. Each of the dead is given just enough background to place them as individuals (an approach brilliantly developed in the elegiac poem *Memorial* by Alice Oswald). Honour and dignity deserve to be defended but what are the effective means of doing so? Homer himself does not offer his own view but allows his characters to reflect on the dilemmas that the unfolding of events imposes on them. This is the mark of any great work of literature and many see the *Iliad* as the greatest. (My favourite translation of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is by the late Robert Fagles in the Penguin Classics Edition (1991 and 1996). The Forewords by Bernard Knox are also excellent.)

So this is an age, and here a specific situation, where authority is fluid. Wealth and high birth will give an individual a platform, and status can be won by appropriate valour on the battlefield. Off the battlefield leaders must win or maintain status through the skill they show in enthusing and persuading others. There is no democracy here but the people expect to be given reasons for action and can be guided towards it either in preparation for war or in the more peaceful setting of Ithaca where elders address a people's assembly. So speeches play a prominent part in both epics with dialogues that follow in debate providing a precedent for Greek tragedy and, through that, western theatre. They can be formal speeches with a crowd to be persuaded, as in the confrontation between Achilles and Agamemnon in Book I of the *Iliad*, or conversational as between Odysseus and his wife Penelope where a more intimate relationship has to be negotiated.

In his pique, Achilles refuses to fight, even wishing destruction on his own side. Eventually, as the Trojans, under their great war leader Hector, son of Priam, drive back the Greeks to their ships, Achilles relents so far as to lend his war armour to his companion Patroclus. Patroclus is killed and this, rather than the fate of his countrymen, finally impels Achilles to revenge. 'His thoughts are wild, like a lion who gives in to his great force and overmanly heart and goes against the flocks of mortals to seize his feast,' as Homer puts it. In war Achilles is a machine who moves forward slashing and stabbing without mercy. He kills Hector, who has himself been described as if he were a fire raging across the mountainside, and mutilates his body so that he can drag him off behind his chariot. This is the symbolic moment when Troy is doomed, the eventual fate known to every Greek but not the focus of the few days of combat described in the *Iliad*. As Achilles broods on his victory he is disturbed in the night by old king Priam, coming alone to ransom his dead son. For Achilles the myth that violence and killing leads to glory is broken as he sits with the old man and at last understands the pity of war. He has already been told that he himself will soon die, and Priam's presence makes him realize the effect his death will have on his own ageing father.

In the *Odyssey*, the war has been won and Odysseus, one of the Greek war leaders, makes for his homeland, Ithaca. The poem opens with his faithful wife Penelope in their palace at Ithaca besieged by boorish suitors who hope to make her their wife. She is still hoping against hope that Odysseus has survived Troy. Unknown to her, Odysseus is alive but has been entrapped by the goddess Calypso. Zeus finally persuades the goddess to let him go but he is shipwrecked by the sea god Poseidon, who bears him a grudge. Odysseus is washed up in the kingdom of the Phaeacians, where he is rescued by Nausicaa, the daughter of the local king, Alcinous. Offered hospitality and entertained with games and poetry, Odysseus relates a whole series of fantastic adventures he has undergone since leaving Troy. They include the capture of himself and his men by the Cyclops, one-eyed giants, his temptation by the Sirens, and sailing between the twin horrors of the monster Scylla and the whirlpool Charybdis. Restored to good health by the welcome of the Phaeacians, Odysseus eventually leaves for Ithaca. He lands there disguised as a beggar, but is gradually recognized by those who know him from many years

before, among them his faithful dog, Argus, and his old nurse. After destroying the suitors in a scene as violent as any in the *Iliad*, he is finally reunited with Penelope in a moving scene of middle-aged love.

The world of the epic is one of superhuman heroes, many of whom are directly descended from the gods. When one of them arrives at the scene of battle he can transform the whole course of events by his exploits. (Appropriately the ‘great’ heroes of Homer, Achilles and Hector, arrive for battle in four-horse chariots—the horses are even given names and lower their heads in mourning when their owner dies.) Achilles seems able to kill men in their hundreds without pausing for rest. However, even heroes die—this is the distinction between them and the immortal gods. Hector and Patroclus fall in the course of the *Iliad* and the imminent death of Achilles is predicted. Homer does not even offer his heroes the possibility of an afterlife, other than in the most shadowy form.

What matters above all in the *Iliad* is honour, preserving dignity in the face of the horror of war, a point developed three centuries later by the tragedian Sophocles. A ‘good’ man is one who shows strength, skill, and courage in battle. He must negotiate his hero status in that period, all too short for many, between reaching manhood and meeting death. The fragility of human existence is at the core of both Homer’s epics. However, the heroes are no stiff-upper-lipped Englishmen. Their plight intensifies their emotions. They sob openly when companions die and are torn with grief at what might happen to their wives and children after they themselves have died. (This is what later disturbed the philosopher Plato who felt that the display of emotion degraded the rational soul.)

It is part of Homer’s appeal that he is able to present another world in contrast to that of war, one of peace in which everyday life is carried on in well-ordered domesticity. Even in the midst of war Troy preserves an atmosphere of civilized living. Priam’s palace is ‘built wide with porches and colonnades of polished stone’, and deep in its cellars are great treasures. There is courtesy and kindness among the city’s inhabitants. In the *Odyssey* there is more scope for the rituals of hospitality in the aristocratic halls where local lords sustain their relationships by feasting and the giving of luxury gifts—bronze cauldrons, fine fabrics, gold and silver. The guest is welcomed. He is washed by the servant girls, fitted out in fresh clothes, and fed. Later his story is listened to with respect and then he is bedded down on the porch, while the lord and his family retire to their own bedrooms.

In these homes the influence of wives is strong. They have a major role in running the household, supervising weaving and the grinding of corn by servant slave girls, watching over the stores, and bringing up their children. While the heroes expect to have women around them available simply for sex, they treat their aristocratic wives with respect. Penelope, for instance, has some sort of emotional equality with her husband. They talk together before making love and share a cosy intimacy as fellow high-status members of their society (although Penelope’s son Telemachus treats his mother with less respect). Arete, wife of king Alcinous of Phaeacia, is described as honoured by her husband as no other wife in the world is honoured. ‘Such has always been the honour paid to Arete by Alcinous and her children and

by the people here, who gaze at her as at a divinity and greet her with loyal words whenever she walks about the town, because she is full of unprompted wisdom.' (Translation: Walter Shewring.)

In a violent and unsettled age, however, there was no doubt that women were desperately dependent on the protection of their husbands. Hector's wife Andromache is all too well aware of the impulses that drive men to fight. 'Your own vital energy will destroy you,' she tells her husband. Some of the most heart-rending scenes in the *Iliad* come when Andromache realizes what her fate will be if Hector dies. She will probably be dragged off as a captive and become a slave and unwilling sexual partner to a Greek warlord. Penelope, too, is alone. Her son, Telemachus, is at the threshold of manhood but still not assured enough to be able to offer protection to his mother against her persistent suitors. She has to rely on her own guile to delay accepting any of them as a husband, and the situation is only resolved when Odysseus, aided now by Telemachus, slaughters them. Yet she has retained her integrity and status throughout and the appreciation of a woman who sustains her chosen role under enormous provocation and temptation is one of Homer's achievements.

Set against scenes of both peace and war and often woven into them is the natural world. Homer never forgets the rhythms of everyday life and the backdrop of sea, sunlight, and stars. Outside Troy the Greek armies bed down for the night by their watchfires:

As stars in the night sky glittering round the moon's brilliance blaze in all their glory when the air falls to a sudden windless calm... all the lookout peaks stand out and the jutting cliffs and the steep ravines and down from the high heavens bursts the boundless bright air and all the stars shine clear and the shepherd's heart exults—so many fires burned between the ships and the [river] Xanthus' whirling rapids. (Translation: Robert Fagles)

In the *Odyssey*, a poem of longing *par excellence*, Odysseus is impatient to set out on the final journey to Ithaca:

Odysseus all the while kept turning his head towards the glowing sun, impatient for it to set, because he yearned to be on his way home again. He was like a man who longs for his evening meal when all day long his two dark red oxen have drawn his jointed plough over the fallow; thankful he is when sunlight goes; he can limp home to his meal at last. (Translation: Walter Shewring)

The gods play an essential but ambivalent role in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Homer presents them as a closely connected family with their home on Mount Olympus: Zeus and his wife Hera, their children, Ares, the god of war, and Hephaestus and, by Zeus' other liaisons, Apollo and Athena. However, they seldom work in unity. In the *Odyssey* Athena acts as a protecting goddess for Odysseus while Poseidon, Zeus' brother, is out to upset him. In the *Iliad* the gods are even more partisan. Hera and Athena are violently against the Trojans while Apollo takes their side. The gods can also act unscrupulously with each other to get their way. Hera tires Zeus with love-making so that she can put her own stratagems in hand while he is recovering in sleep. While this adds to a sense of tragedy, the helplessness of humanity if the gods

are aroused, it also enlarges the possibility of individual humans forging their own ethical positions independently of the gods. There are instances in both epics when the heroes ponder on the best course to take. They are even free to attack the gods, as Agamemnon does on one occasion, berating Zeus for his cruelty to men.

Perhaps the greatest contribution that Homer has made to European literature is to provide a model of human beings who place their own dignity before submission to the whims of the gods, something later lost in the Christian tradition where challenging God becomes unacceptable in conventional literature. Here the comparative lack of distance between humanity and the gods allows a psychological complexity that adds to the sophistication of the work. Yet there are always limits, set by the gods, beyond which behaviour is unacceptable. The dreaded crime of *hubris*, overweening pride, will always be punished. In the brutal scene towards the end of the *Odyssey* where Odysseus slays the suitors he tells how he is justified because of their refusal to show the appropriate respect to those around them. They have flouted the limits of 'divine law' by their shameless bullying of the isolated Penelope and their exploitation of her hospitality. It is the gods' will that they should die.

For later generations Homer remained a great moral teacher. In a vast cache of papyrus texts found in the rubbish dump at Oxyrhynchus in Egypt, Homer leads the classical authors with some thousand fragments of his work. In fifth-century Athens boys would learn the epics by heart and not only absorb a heritage but understand appropriate behaviour in different contexts from the many different types of relationship portrayed. The tragedies of the Trojan War become inextricably linked to Greek mythology and drama. The emotional power of Homer persisted into the Roman period. Part of his enduring genius lies in his portrayal of heroes as fully human beings whose dilemmas remain real to his readers nearly three thousand years later. Through Homer the Trojan War continues to haunt the European consciousness as the archetype of all wars and the dilemmas and dangers for all that violence brings.

Hesiod

The consciousness that in religious matters the Greeks had moved on from more primitive traditions of abject dependence on the gods and could move on even further is found in the poems of a contemporary of Homer, the poet Hesiod (normally dated to about 700 BC). Unlike Homer, Hesiod provides some biographical details about himself. His father had migrated back from overseas to Boeotia on the Greek mainland, where Hesiod had been born. The family estates were small, and when Hesiod and his brother inherited them they soon quarrelled over their shares. Hesiod comes over as a cynical and pessimistic figure, hardened by the experience of peasant life and with deep-rooted prejudices against women.

The earliest work of Hesiod to survive is the *Theogony*. Its aim, in Hesiod's words, is to 'tell how in the first place the gods and the earth came to be, and the rivers and

the boundless sea with its seething swell and the shining stars and the wide heaven above, as well as the gods born of these givers of good things'. While Homer presents the gods of Mount Olympus as if they had always been in existence, Hesiod wants to go back further to the act of creation itself. In this he is drawing not on Greek traditions but on the creation myths of the east, with which his stories show many parallels. He evokes primitive and tempestuous gods, Uranus, god of heaven, and Gaia, goddess of earth. Their relationship is a violent one and at one point their son, Cronos, cuts off his father's genitals. They fall into the sea and, as they float in their own blood and semen, the goddess of love, Aphrodite, is born from the mixture (not that viewers of Botticelli's celebrated *Birth of Venus* (the Roman version of Aphrodite) would ever guess at this method of conception). Cronos himself fathers the Olympian gods, who under the leadership of Zeus have to do battle with the Titans, children of Uranus and Gaia, before they can reign supreme. Woven into the *Theogony* are other myths such as that of Prometheus, a champion of humankind, who stole fire from heaven. Zeus' revenge on men includes, according to Hesiod, the creation of women. Hesiod plumbs dark depths of the human psyche left untouched by Homer.

Hesiod is also known as the author of a very different poem, *Works and Days*. One theme of this work is the concept of history as moving forward through phases from ages of gold, silver, and bronze to one of heroes before reaching the unhappy present, the age of iron. This is an age, Hesiod argues, with specific reference to his quarrel over land with his brother, in which ethical standards have broken down, when the rich landowner lords it over the poor peasant, who is defenceless against his power. (It has been argued that Hesiod is drawing on eastern wisdom literature in presenting himself and his brother as personifications of good and evil. The work, as a whole, is set within a religious framework.) However, all is not without hope. There is the possibility of justice, *dike*, and Zeus, normally seen as indifferent to the suffering of man, is invoked by Hesiod as its protector. It is up to human beings to work hard so that good order can be achieved in unity with the gods (there are echoes here of Egyptian Middle Kingdom texts). This is ultimately a much more optimistic philosophy than any offered by Homer and it reflects the dawning of a new age, that of the city-state where justice can perhaps be made a reality.

Much of *Works and Days* is concerned with life on the land and consists of what can be seen as advice on the cultivation of crops, what should be sown, when harvest should take place, and how to fill the slack times of year. (The motivation for including this may be the desire of the poet to show how the good man lives an ordered life, particularly through knowing how to cultivate the land properly.) There is some evidence, though it remains disputed, that population growth was leading to a transformation of agriculture, with the large grazing herds of the aristocracy being replaced by the more intensive arable farming described by Hesiod. Livestock was the ideal form of wealth in a time of instability. Stock could at least be rounded up and put in a secure place—a field of barley, the grain most suitable for the dry soil of Greece, could not. Stock, in large numbers, are a good way of reflecting status

but a highly inefficient way of producing calories for human consumption. Most of those eaten by the animals are lost and could have been better consumed by humans directly as grain. This is why a growing population might initiate more grain-growing and by doing so undermine the traditional aristocratic way of life. Again, because an olive tree takes several years to mature, the decision to grow it is in itself a symbol of stability.

The Appearance of the *Polis*?

The transition may have been easier because the aristocracy had no secure control over the local peasantries. There was, in fact, a deep-rooted prejudice against providing any form of regular labour for others. In Homer the landless labourer hiring himself out to others is presented as the lowest possible form of life, only marginally better than death. As a result the mass of the Greek population was never restricted in its mobility, and as population grew this made it possible for larger settlements, towns and cities, to emerge without hindrance, often through the merging of neighbouring villages. When they needed protection the farmers would retreat to local high ground—the Acropolis in Athens, Acrocorinth in Corinth (Greek *acros*, ‘highest’)—but some Cycladic sites may have been walled as early as 900. The walls of Smyrna, the modern Izmir, for instance, appear to date from 850. By the late eighth century there is the first evidence of paved streets (such as at Phaistos, on Crete). These towns may have taken the cities of the Phoenicians on the coast of the Levant as their model.

It was through this development that the *polis* (plural *poleis*), seen by many as the essential social and political unit within which Greek life was to be lived for centuries to come, was born. The *polis* was, in the first instance, the physical entity of a city, its buildings and the walls around them. Comparisons with other Indo-European languages suggest that the original meaning of the word might be ‘stronghold’. Certainly the practice of enclosing these settlements in walls suggests that defence was important. The archaeological evidence, especially from the Cyclades, is growing and over 40 per cent of Greek towns appear to have had walls by the end of the sixth century BC. Yet the *polis* in its mature form was much more than a defended site. Aristotle, writing in the fourth century, provides the more conventional view that it was a community, living primarily in a city but drawing on the lands that surrounded it for its supplies. The community needs to find ways of governing itself and so ‘politics’. Aristotle was certainly reflecting the busy political life of his day. What is harder to discern is at what point a ‘stronghold’ of the eighth century becomes a political community of the fifth and fourth.

Until recently scholars took at face value the foundation myths of individual *poleis* that speak as if they had existed as sophisticated bodies of citizens, with buildings to match, from the moment of foundation. The archaeological evidence suggests, in contrast, that the process was much more gradual and these myths are now being seen as later rationalizations of a city’s identity with an idealization of its

own citizenship. In the eighth and seventh century the *polis* has a much less stable identity. In many areas of Greece, there were *ethne*, ‘peoples’, who shared a common identity and culture and may even have held assemblies but did not give any priority to their urban settlements. Sparta always remained a scatter of villages. While *agora*, open spaces set aside for assemblies, are known from the eighth century, few *poleis* had the resources before the sixth century to embellish them with civic buildings, and it is only in this century that many aspects of civilized city life such as paved streets and fountains appear.

The increasing amount of evidence from the Dark Age suggests many *poleis* were actually settlements that had originated in Mycenaean times and had never been abandoned. So they were primarily strongholds that had survived as the most secure centres of population. With the birth of new confidence and prosperity in the eighth century these simply became the focus for expanding urban settlement. Yet there were no mechanisms through which any individual could accumulate great wealth or organize military force against his fellows. Zagora on the island of Andros may not be a typical settlement but its houses were set out on a regular plan and there appear to have been two districts, one on the upper plateau of the site, where buildings are larger than those in the other district, on the slopes below. This suggests an elite but without a dominant leader. So a *polis* may be an ancient Bronze Age site which grew organically with the rise in population but which had then to work out ways of ruling itself. The evidence suggests that the elite members of the community were often torn between trying to keep their status as an aristocratic class, which transcended the relative parochialism of the city, and negotiating their status as leaders within their community.

The *polis* is necessarily preoccupied with its identity. It finds a protecting god, Athena for Athens and Sparta, Hera in Samos, Apollo in Eretria (on Euboea) and Corinth. An altar is built to a god or goddess, later a temple, at first on the same model as the aristocratic hall, the *megaron*, and then more grandly with its own peristyle of columns. An early, eighth-century example is the temple to Hera at Samos. Originally built as a long narrow building with a cult statue housed at the back, it was transformed with a rectangle of wooden columns set on stone bases. The sanctuary is marked by a boundary enclosing the sacred space, the *temenos*, another word known from the Linear B tablets. The temple becomes the pride of the city, and by the seventh century cities are competing with each other to provide the grandest. The focus on temples rather than on palaces is an important feature of the emerging *polis* as it shows that political and religious power remain distinct. One of the ways in which the later ‘tyrants’ (see below, p. 166) aim to boost their status is by providing a temple themselves so blurring the distinction.

One of the most important developments of the eighth century is a dramatic increase in the use of religious centres that were remote from any city and totally unconnected with them, among them Delos, the island of Apollo, in the centre of the Aegean, the oracle at Delphi, and Olympia, the home of games every four years. They jealously guarded their independence from any one *polis*. The neighbouring city of Elis administered Olympia but did not control it while Delphi was

supervised by a group of cities, the Amphictyony. These shrines played an important part in mediating disputes and releasing class tensions. The oracle at Delphi, dedicated to Apollo, but giving its judgements through a priestess, helped mediate disputes between states and gave its approval to new city constitutions. It had an important role in advising on the settlement of new colonies and often this must have involved dissolving factional tensions by isolating the parties in conflict (sending one of them overseas!). At Olympia the games provided a means by which aristocrats (they alone had the leisure to train) could maintain their status by winning against other members of their class. Surviving dedications on statues found in shrines show that the victors often referred to themselves by their lineage not by their city. Status could also be assured by the opulence of offerings.

As supplicants at shrines and participants in games brought offerings, the archaeological record is rich and the dramatic expansion of these centres in the eighth century is easily plotted. At Delphi, the oracle sacred to Apollo, bronze figurines, presented as offerings, have been found in their hundreds. Only one dates from the ninth century, over 150 from the eighth. The traditional date for the founding of the Olympic Games is 776 BC although there appear to have been festivals to Zeus on the site much earlier than this. The eighth century saw a vast increase in the number of dedications, especially in the form of bronze tripods.

The rise of the pan-Hellenic shrines goes hand in hand with the increasing mobility of the age—the Greek world was expanding fast in the eighth century and the consequences for the maturing of Greek culture were immense.

The Orientalizing Revolution

The Greek mainland is naturally focused towards the east. The mountain ranges run from west to east and the mountains continue as the Aegean islands, stepping-stones for eastern traders. All the best Greek harbours are on the east coast. The east offered a glittering lure to the Greeks, whose lives were always frugal and where a surplus had to be painfully won from the land. So as trade revived and the Greeks recovered their confidence, it was natural that there would be interaction and collaboration and that this would have its own impact on the developing culture of the Greeks.

Yet it took time for scholars to spot this impact. In the nineteenth century the Greeks were assumed to have a racial and cultural purity and so the influence of eastern civilizations was ignored, but the Danish scholar Frederik Poulsen recognized the eastern contributions to Greek art as far back as 1912, and the theme was developed in the 1960s by John Boardman in his *The Greeks Overseas* (latest edition, London and New York, 1999). Oswyn Murray first used the term 'The Orientalizing Period' in 1980 to describe not just a revolution in art but a development in Greek society as a whole, and Walter Burkert's *The Orientalising Revolution* appeared in its German original in 1984.

'Orientalizing' was the result of a complex and varied set of relationships between the Greeks and the peoples of the east that lasted over centuries. Eastern motifs appear in Cretan pottery as early as the ninth century while Egypt was an important influence on Greek architecture and sculpture as late as 600 BC. Some influences came as the result of eastern craftsmen who came to the west as refugees, others from goods, among them now vanished textiles, that were taken west by traders and copied by local craftsmen, while the Greeks themselves may have learned directly from contacts in the east. Disentangling the various influences is made harder by the response of the Greeks themselves. In Egypt the kings had created and enforced an easily recognizable palace style. In Greece, with no single dominant state, each area could develop its own response to the east, and it took time for a more uniform Greek culture to emerge from what was absorbed. Nor were Oriental cultures stable, with successive civilizations following on from each other in the Near East, so it is impossible to trace many of the contacts between the shifting cultures.

Without doubt the most important immediate influence on the Greeks were the Phoenicians, a people the Greeks viewed with a mixture of awe and suspicion, 'famous as seamen, tricksters, bringing tens of thousands of trinkets in their ships,' as Homer put it. By the ninth century they were well established in their cities along the Levantine coast and had begun to reach out into the Mediterranean itself. Their first recorded colony at Kition on the south-eastern coast of Cyprus was founded in the late ninth century. They were more mature and confident than the Greeks at this stage and probably ventured to the west, with its tricky crossing between the Peloponnese and the coast of Italy, some generations before the Greeks. The traditional founding date of their most important overseas colony, Carthage, on the coast of north Africa, is 814 and large numbers of trading-posts were established on the southern coast of Spain in the eighth century. They were also expert shipbuilders, and the *pentekonter*, the fifty-oar warship, and the trireme may have been Phoenician in origin, although the evidence for this remains fragmentary.

It was traders from the island of Euboea, at first from Lefkandi (see Chapter 9) and its successor, the city of Eretria, and Chalcis who seem to have made the first tentative steps at mingling with the Phoenicians and infiltrating the east. Their story has been told by Robin Lane Fox in his *Travelling Heroes* (London and New York, 2008) in which he gives the Euboeans the defining role in opening up the Mediterranean. Lane Fox's critics have questioned whether they deserve this accolade and question, in particular, why they are not given a more prominent role in Homer where travel westwards is a major theme of the *Odyssey*. Despite this, his book provides a wealth of material on the period and an acute feel for the geography of the sites. What the Euboeans had to offer in return for the luxury goods and metals they craved is not clear. There is some Euboean pottery of about 925 BC found in northern Syria, but slaves were the most likely export, one that would have left no trace in the archaeological record. By 825 the Euboeans appear to have had a foothold at al-Mina on the Orontes river, a trading-post where Greek influence survives alongside that of Phoenicians, Cypriots, and possibly other traders. Al-Mina offered the shortest caravan route to Mesopotamia via the towns of northern Syria. It was possibly here that the Greeks first picked up the Phoenician alphabet.

If the Greeks were probing east, there was perhaps a greater flow of peoples to the west. From the ninth century onwards the Phoenicians and the other peoples of the Near East were increasingly under pressure from the expanding power of Assyria (see p. 93). Assyrians stood on the shore of the Mediterranean for the first time in 877. Al-Mina was overrun by about 720. One of the major Phoenician cities, Sidon, was totally destroyed in 677. The Assyrian invasions of Egypt (see p. 103) followed in the seventh century. In Assyrian sources there are some records of retaliatory Greek raids, possibly by Greek pirates based in Cilicia (southern Turkey). One result of all these upheavals was the fleeing of eastern craftsmen as refugees to Greece.

The archaeological evidence of this contact with the east is widespread. As a result of the custom that victors in the Olympic Games dedicated cauldrons to the sanctuary, more eastern bronzes have been found at Olympia than any other site yet

discovered in the eastern world. These great cauldrons, with their cast animal-head attachments, originate from Assyria, northern Syria, or the state of Urartu, east of the Euphrates. There are jewellery and gems, seals in Syrian and Egyptian styles (as has been suggested earlier, Egyptian goods were probably traded in the Mediterranean through Phoenician middlemen), shells from the Red Sea, and Phoenician silver bowls. The round shield of the Greek hoplite (p. 163 below) and the horsehair crest of his helmet are similar to those of the Assyrian infantry. A large proportion of the trade must have been in fabrics, but they have perished.

These fine goods were decorated with a whole world of eastern images that were soon copied. In many cases the derivation is obvious: for instance, there are 'royal' figures on cauldrons very similar to those found in the stone reliefs in the Assyrian capitals. The later Greek portrayals of Zeus and his thunderbolt and Poseidon and his trident appear to derive from models of warrior gods from the Syro-Hittite region who are depicted brandishing weapons in their right hands. There are no lions in Greece, but they appear now in Greek art. The *chimaera*, a composite of lion, she-goat, and serpent, is linked to Hittite representations, while the Triton, a merman, seems to come straight from Mesopotamia. There is a wealth of foliage, including lotus leaves and friezes of palms. By the late eighth century these influences are transforming the art on Greek pottery into a new exoticism—'boars, wild goats, dogs, chickens, lions, sphinxes and griffins endlessly parade around countless seventh-century vases', in the graphic words of Jeffrey Hurwit (whose *The Art and Culture of Early Greece, 1100–480 BC*, Ithaca, NY, 1987, provides an excellent introduction). (See also Ann Gunter, *Greek Art and the Orient*, Cambridge and New York, 2009, that stresses the links with Assyria.)

With the goods and their craftsmen came new skills. Whatever they made of the deviousness of the Phoenicians, the Greeks had to accept the supremacy of their craft skills. *Polydaidaloi*, 'of many skills', is how Homer describes the Phoenician makers of a large silver bowl awarded as first prize at the funeral games of Patroclus. The Phoenician metalworkers were clever at hammering and fashioning bronze and silver. From the east and Egypt came the technique of casting with the 'lost wax' method, in which a core of wax is surrounded by clay and then melted out leaving a mould into which molten bronze is poured. There was also ivory-working. Ivory was always regarded as a mysterious substance by the Greeks (any description of elephants and their tusks must have bordered on the fabulous), and, with faience work, was prominent among imported luxury goods.

The influence from the east was not confined to its art. The skill of writing, perhaps the most important gift from the east to the Greeks, has already been discussed. The habit of reclining at a couch for a meal or a drinking party replaced the traditional custom of sitting upright in the eighth century. It probably originated in Palestine. The cult of Adonis, the young man, beloved by Aphrodite, who was killed by a boar while hunting, has its origins in the annual death of a vegetation god celebrated in the Phoenician city of Byblos (from where it seems to have travelled first to Cyprus, the island of Aphrodite, and thence to Greece). Mount Kasios, on the Levantine coast near al-Mina and just visible from Cyprus, appears as the setting

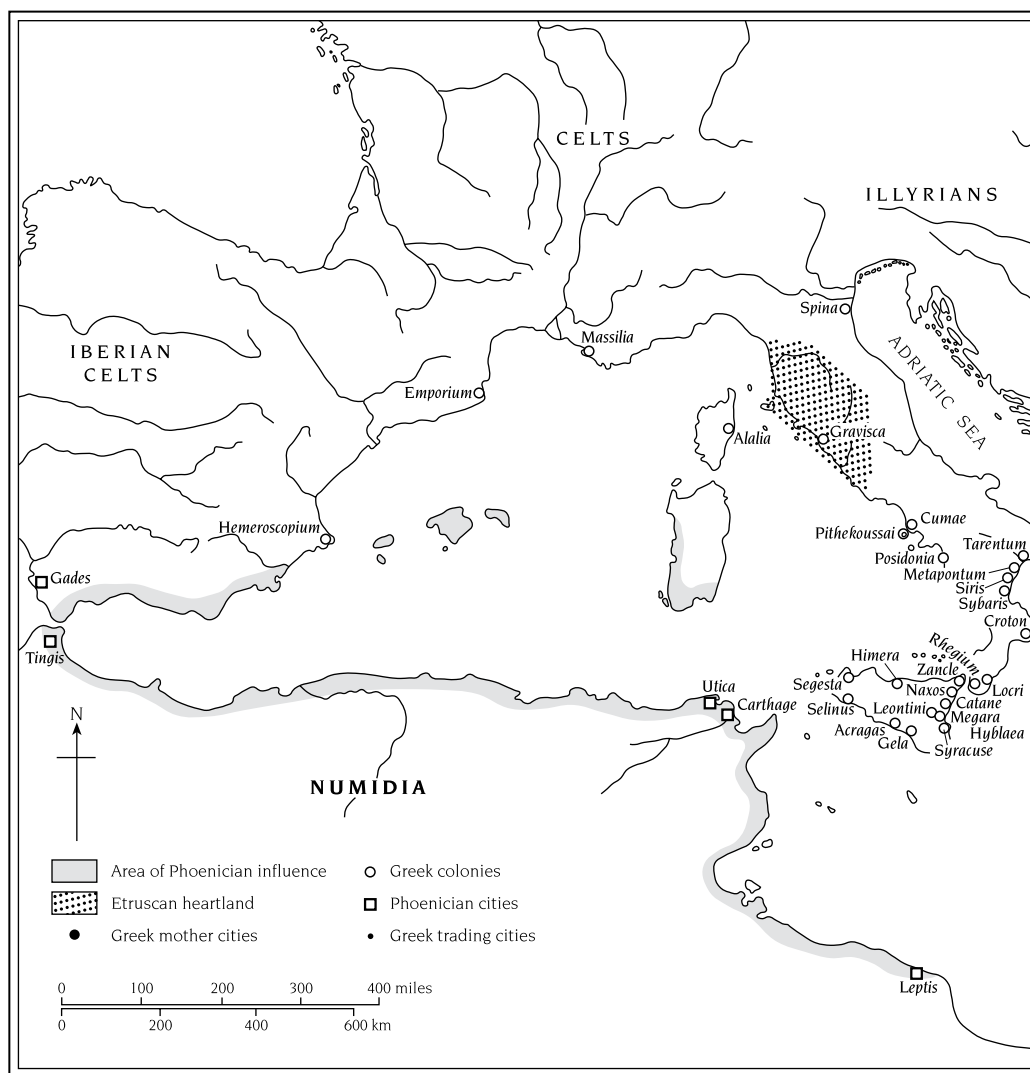
for a battle between Zeus and a hundred-headed monster, Typhoeus. It is only part of a rich mythology, seen in the works of Hesiod, for instance, which has its roots in the east. Hades, the Greek underworld, has parallels with the realm of mud and darkness described in the Mesopotamian epic *Gilgamesh*. The idea of a foundation deposit of precious metals and stones placed under new buildings is found in Assyria, and the Khaniala Tekke tomb in Crete of about 800 BC appears to have had a similar deposit of gold left there by migrant Syrian goldsmiths. The custom spread in the Greek world, and later temples at Delos and Ephesus had similar deposits.

With these movements came the language of trade, a series of Semitic words some of which have made a further transfer into English. Goods would be contained in a *sakkos* and among them might be found *krokas* (crocus), *kannabis*, and *kinnamomon* (cinnamon). The Greek unit of weight, *mina*, comes from the Akkadian *mana*. *Plinthos*, a clay brick, originates in Mesopotamia, makes its way into Greek architecture as the base of a column, and is still used in English. The Assyrian *maskanu*, a booth or tent, reappears in Greek theatre as *skena*, the backdrop of the stage, and hence 'scene'.

In the enthusiasm to dig out the influences of the east on the Greeks, some have gone so far as to suggest that the Greeks were simply an appendage to the eastern world during this period. Certainly the Greeks may have been diffident in the face of the opulence of the eastern civilizations and the seafaring skills of the Phoenicians, but in almost every sphere they ended up transforming what they had learned for their own ends. Greek art, literature, religion, and mythology may contain eastern influences, but ultimately they are Greek. The alphabet is borrowed, then transformed with the use of vowels into something infinitely more flexible. Homer may have absorbed elements of epic style from Mesopotamia, but the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* stand as works of literature in their own right set in an unmistakably Greek world. The Dipylon master might have borrowed eastern images for his goats and deer, but they are fitted into his own geometric design. In the art of pottery-making itself the Greeks had nothing to learn from the east. Here are a people confident enough to borrow and transform and so provide a distinct culture of their own.

The Western Settlements

By the eighth century, the Euboeans were also looking to the west. It was not an easy route for them to take. They had either to make a land crossing over the Isthmus of Corinth before setting out along the Gulf of Corinth or brave the dangerous coast of the southern Peloponnese. On either route there was an open crossing to the Italian coast although the distance, to the heel of Italy, must not be exaggerated. Once again it seems that the more adventurous Phoenicians had shown the way. By the end of the ninth century Phoenicians may have been settled on Sardinia, where there were rich deposits of copper, tin, lead, and iron ore. There are also hints of a Phoenician presence in southern Italy in the early eighth century. The Euboeans followed later, probably about the middle of the century, and also in search of



MAP 3

metals. Sardinia appears to have been the richest source, but it may well have been that the Phoenicians were so well established there that the Euboeans made their way instead up the western Italian coast to the island of Ischia. Here at Pithekoussai they formed a settlement to trade with the peoples of the Italian mainland. It seems to have been in full operation by 750 BC.

The settlement at Pithekoussai was predominantly Greek but there is also evidence that Phoenician and perhaps other eastern traders helped make up the population. Its model was almost certainly the Phoenician trading settlements in Sardinia and Spain. Pithekoussai echoes the Phoenician Gadir (the modern Cadiz) in that it

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800–600 BC



was close to important resources yet isolated enough to be secure. Its main focus was the metal ores of central Italy and beyond (tin may have come into Italy from Britain via France), and soon Greeks were face to face with the Etruscans (see Chapter 21), who had formed a loose confederation of states in the area north of Rome.

As the Greeks became increasingly confident on the sea and as their wealth and population increased, they began to travel for other reasons, predominantly to find new homes for their surplus populations. In theory there is a distinction between the Greek *emporía*, trading-posts, and the *apoikiai*, colonies, where the peoples of one originating city dominate and set the rules for others, but the line between

them is fluid. Trading cities such as al-Mina and Naucratis in Egypt (see below) were definitely *emporía* because they were in areas where the Greeks had no political independence and could do little but trade. Pithekoussai is somewhere in between, a settlement under Greek control, openly trading but also earning a living from the provision of skills to foreign communities. About 725 BC, relatively soon after Pithekoussai's foundation, a breakaway settlement was founded at Cumae on the Italian coast. Important to Cumae was its own land, its safe beach, and its acropolis. It was also inhabited, it was said, predominantly by settlers whose origin was the Euboean city of Chalcis. In this sense it can be termed a colony.

Cumae was the ideal colony, a safe site, with a good harbour or sheltered beach and land to support the settlers. This was the goal of a mass of migrants from Greece who during the years 730–580 BC spread across the Mediterranean, the migration only coming to an end when the best sites had been settled. The final result was to establish a Greek presence in the Mediterranean from the Black Sea in the north-east to the coast of modern France and Spain in the west. The catalyst is assumed to be population increase in mainland Greece and to a lesser extent in the Greek cities of Asia Minor (although it has to be said that archaeology has not yet confirmed a correlation between the most energetic colonizing cities and the areas of Greece in which population growth appears to have been highest). The impulse to trade remained an important factor. Many colonies, even while living primarily off the land, were on trading routes, exploited their local resources, and exchanged goods with the native peoples.

The Greek custom was for landholdings to be shared equally between sons. As the history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century France, where there is a similar (Napoleonic) system of inheritance, has shown, the custom breeds a mass of peasantry living in small lots which only provide a surplus in exceptional years. The peasants are tough, hardworking, deeply conservative, and understandably cynical about the possibilities of any improvement in their lot—one reason why they make such good soldiers. With an increase in population their future can only get worse. Settlement overseas is the best alternative, and peasants are ideally suited to the task of taking new land in hand. For those who had mastered the art of living in Greece, the Mediterranean offered many sites where conditions were as good as or even better than those left behind.

Later Greek sources talk of the *apoikiai*, 'homes from home', as if they were normally set up by a mother city. Whether the earliest settlements were part of such an organized process is uncertain. In the eighth century the *polis* was scarcely developed in much of Greece and migration may have taken place in a much more haphazard way, perhaps as a result of conflict over land. Later a *polis* often did take responsibility for organizing a colonial expedition, sometimes forcibly sending out excess population. (One unhappy group of would-be colonists from the island of Thera, sent out when the island was hit by a drought, were refused landing when they returned without having founded a colony.) The cohesion of the *polis* meant that the colonists knew each other and may already have been bound to each other

in kinship groups. A typical colonizing group would have been of 100–200 young men. (The *pentekonter*, adopted by the Greeks from the Phoenicians, took at least fifty men, and two or three would sail together.) Sometimes, as in the case of Thera, each family with more than one son was ordered to provide one of them for the colony, certainly the fairest way of dealing with land shortage and a good indication of the well-established authority of the *polis* by the late seventh century. (The Theran expedition is dated to 630.) Once the colonists arrived they would maintain links with their home city, often importing its pottery exclusively and maintaining cults and customs from home. The foundation oath of the Theran settlement, which was eventually established at Cyrene on the north African coast, gave any citizen of Thera who later joined the colony an automatic right to citizenship of the colony and access to unallotted land. However, insofar as the word colony suggests political dependence on the mother city, this is misleading. With the exception of Corinth, which attempted to keep firm control over its foundations, overseas colonies quickly asserted their independence.

The rituals of colonization were well developed. The colonizing city would provide a leader, usually of aristocratic or semi-aristocratic status. His first task, especially if planning to head west, was to approach the oracle at Delphi where Apollo gave guidance on the sites to choose. 'Here is Taphiasos, the unploughed, on your path, and there is Chalcis: then the sacred lands of the Kouretes and then the Echinades. Great is the ocean to the left. But even so I would not expect you to miss the Lakinian cape, nor sacred Krimissa, nor the river Aisaros' is one surviving piece of advice. Armed with these instructions, the colonists would take with them 'the sacred fire' of their home city, probably in fact only ashes, with which to kindle their first sacrificial fire on arrival and confirm their spiritual links with home. (These reported oracles may in some cases be foundation myths that were developed later to rationalize the choice of site.)

According to Plutarch, writing some centuries later, the leader was entrusted by Apollo with the 'signs for recognizing places, the times for activities, the shrines of the gods across the sea, the secret burial places of heroes, hard to find for men setting forth on a distant voyage from Greece'. It seems that his role was to assess the sites with the best omens, perhaps those which had some connection with earlier expeditions (the 'burial places of heroes'). Certainly attempts were made to link a chosen site with a mythical figure from the past. Heracles, for instance, was supposed to have carried out one of his labours, the subduing of the monster Geryon, in Sicily and this was used to justify choosing sites there. Whatever the omens, however, it is hard to dispute that the final choice would have been made on purely practical grounds of survival. The best sites were those with harbours, fertile land, peaceful or conquerable natives, and a defensible hilltop for times of crisis. The leader would mark out the limits of the new city, set out the sacred areas for its temples, and divide up land. His status was so assured that after his death it was usual for a hero cult to be established in his honour. At Megara Hyblaia, for instance, a *heroön*, a small sanctuary for the cult, had been found alongside the *agora*.

The descendants of those who had come with him would often continue as the ruling classes of the city, preserving their status against newcomers.

The earliest Greek colonies were in the west and in the eighth century they were still overwhelmingly the creations of the Euboeans. Naxos, a headland site with a small fertile valley behind it, was the first landfall in Sicily for ships rounding the toe of Italy. The Chalcidians colonized it about 734 BC. (These dates are derived from the account by the fifth-century historian Thucydides.) Leontini, set inland and thus of no trading importance, Catane and Zancle, along the north-eastern Sicilian coast, and Rhegium on the Italian coast overlooking the strategically important Straits of Messina were all Chalcidian colonies established by the end of the eighth century. It was the Corinthians, however, who settled the finest Sicilian site of all, Syracuse, in about 733 BC. It had the best harbour on the island, a permanent source of fresh water in the spring Arethusa, and access to fertile land. The archaeology suggests a violent takeover from the native Sicels and the imposition of Greek buildings on the native settlement. The temple of Apollo, early sixth century BC, is an important statement of Greek supremacy. Syracuse was eventually to become the richest city of the Greek world.

In contrast to Syracuse, at Megara Hyblaia, founded from Megara in about 735 BC the migrants were welcomed by the natives—Hyblaia is derived from the name of the local ruler Hyblon. The relationships between Greeks and native were complex. In many cases there was collaboration. The city of Selinunte, the most western of the Greek cities on the south Sicilian coast, even made arrangements with Segesta, originally the capital of the native Elymians, and a trading partner, to provide marriage partners. As the Greeks were settled predominantly on the coast it was natural to create relationships with the peoples inland, who benefited from direct contact with the sea, and such was the take-up of Greek goods by the natives that it is often difficult to distinguish Greek from native settlements. Yet it was Greek culture and the Greek language that came to dominate. The impact was often early. In the *Odyssey*, the Phaeacians have founded a new city (in what appears to be Corfu) with walls, divided land plots, and space for sacred buildings. This is echoed archaeologically at Megara Hyblaia where an *agora*, the assembly place (the word was only used of 'market-place' later), was marked out from the start and the small domestic buildings arranged on grids in surrounding neighbourhoods. Whether these represented original community or kinship groups is not known but there was clearly a need to reimpose a communal identity on the virgin site. It took some years before the community had the resources to construct public buildings but one of these next to the *agora* was the *heroön*. In contrast Metapontum, on the in-step of Italy, appears first as a mixed Greek and native settlement. In the second half of the sixth century the community appropriated the surrounding land, marked it out into farmsteads and started cultivating olives. At the same time, they reorganized the city itself, setting up a building for public assemblies (the *ekklesiasterion*). So here is a settlement with no defined Greek identity forming itself into a self-sustaining *polis*.

For the most part larger public buildings do not appear before the sixth century, when they do on the Greek mainland and the Aegean. By then, the Sicilian Greeks were competing against each other through temple building. The most western of the Greek foundations in southern Sicily, Selinunte, enjoyed a hundred years of peace and prosperity between 580 and 480 BC and showed off its opulence in three truly massive temples fronting its eastern side. Further east the temples at Agragas are built along the edge of a ridge, thus making a dramatic statement of power to anyone arriving. When the people of Segesta in western Sicily wished to impress the Athenians in the hope of getting their support against Selinunte, they showed that Greek culture had erased their Elymian past by building a Greek temple in a commanding position on the hillside where it still stands.

With the Euboeans firmly in control of the Straits of Messina, later settlers moved on, to the coast of Italy itself. The Achaeans from the north-west Peloponnese founded Sybaris, Croton, and Metapontum and, possibly through an overland route from Sybaris, Posidonia on the west coast (in its Latin form, Paestum, known as the home of one of the finest set of surviving Greek temples). High up on the instep of Italy the Spartans founded their only colony, Tarentum. Its first settlers were illegitimate children born to Spartan wives while their husbands had been away on service. (Their illegitimacy deprived them of access to land in Sparta itself.) Tarentum retained exceptionally close ties with Sparta, enjoying its pottery and continuing its native cults.

As the Greek presence in the west became more secure, relationships with the Phoenicians began to break down. The most important Phoenician colony was Carthage on the north African coast. From there the Phoenicians had colonized the west coast of Sicily, and in 580 there were clashes between Greeks and Phoenicians when a band of Greeks from Rhodes tried to settle within the Phoenician enclave. There was more trouble further west. The Phoenicians had struck out along the north African coastline and were soon settling on the Spanish coast. There was a substantial Phoenician presence there by the eighth century. When settlers from the Greek city of Phocaea, on the coast of Asia Minor, came west in the last phase of colonization they found a substantial part of the western Mediterranean already closed to them.

The Phocaeans headed up the west coast of Italy, trading with the Etruscans as they went, and then made their way along the southern coast of France. Their most important settlement was Massilia (modern Marseilles) about 600, but they also edged around the coast of northern Spain, founding a colony at Emporion (modern Ampurias). Their intrusions aroused the suspicions of both Etruscans and Phoenicians. In the 540s a fresh wave of Phocaean settlers came west after their city had been taken over by the Persians. A new colony was founded at Alalia on Corsica and this enabled the Phocaeans to bypass the Etruscans. The Etruscans, furious at losing their trade, joined with the Phoenicians in driving the Phocaeans from Alalia. There are records of further clashes, and by 500 Greeks, Etruscans, and Phoenicians were consolidating separate spheres of influence in the western Mediterranean. It was probably the blocking of traditional routes by the Phoenicians that

finally encouraged the Greeks to trade up the Adriatic coast, a treacherous one as suggested by the number of shipwrecks that have been found there.

The settlement of Massilia enabled the Greeks to trade with the Celtic peoples of Gaul (modern France) through the river valleys. One site, Mount Lassois, overlooking the Seine, south-east of Paris, became especially important. Here tin and other goods from further north were unloaded and transferred either south to the Rhône and thence to Massilia or to northern Italy. In 1953 the excavation of the grave of a Celtic princess at Vix, the cemetery of Mount Lassois, uncovered the largest and finest Greek bronze crater (a bowl for the mixing of wine) ever found. It was 1.64 metres high and complete with its lid and a handle in the shape of a statuette of a woman. The rich decoration included reliefs of warriors and chariots and moulded gorgons. It was probably of Spartan origin. It is too grand an object to be part of normal trade and it can only be assumed that it was a diplomatic gift made to a local leader, possibly in this case a woman, to cement or establish a trading relationship.

The impact of the Greeks on the Celtic Gauls was important. According to the Roman historian Justin (third century AD):

From the Greeks the Gauls learned a more civilized way of life and abandoned their barbarous ways. They set to tilling their fields and walling their towns. They even got used to living by law rather than force of arms, to cultivating the vine and the olive. Their progress, in manners and wealth, was so brilliant that it seemed as though Gaul had become part of Greece, rather than that Greece had colonized Gaul.

The impact must have been less widespread than described here and limited to areas of direct contact. The Celts were proud of their own culture and incorporated prestige objects from Greece and the east into their own rituals, rather than allowing their society to be changed by them. (For the Celts see further p. 355 below.) While the Greeks certainly colonized the coastline of Italy, Sicily, and beyond, this was not imperialism (in the sense that Athens in the fifth century was an imperialist power, see below, p. 260) but often more of a collaborative enterprise. The scale of the migrations, setting out as they did from a number of small settlements in Greece, did not allow for suppression of well-established tribes. Yet whatever the interactions it was Greek material culture and the Greek language that became dominant and the cities saw themselves as part of the wider Greek world enjoying full participation in the games. The sanctuaries at Delphi and Olympia are dotted with treasuries set up by the western colonies. It may even have been that the successful and opulent cities of the west acted as models for the less advanced settlements back on the Greek mainland.

Settlements in the Northern Aegean, Black Sea, and Libya

While successive waves of Greeks were moving west, the versatility and the exuberance of the Euboeans also led them to move northwards from their island, along the coast of Thessaly, to Macedonia and Thrace. One objective may have been timber,

vital for shipping and already becoming in short supply in mainland Greece, but the land was also adapted by settlers to growing vines. Chalcis settled so many sites along the triple-pronged peninsula that juts out into the Aegean from Macedonia that it still retains the name Chalcidice. Further east, towards the entrance to the Black Sea, the native Thracians offered some resistance to Greek expansion.

The most dramatic discovery of recent archaeology has been at the ancient port of Methone on the Thermaic Gulf, 35 kilometres south of the modern Thessalonika. The port provided a sheltered anchorage, was ideally situated for shipping passing along the north–south trade routes in the Aegean, and was close to large supplies of timber. A group of Eretrians who had been expelled from Corfu founded a colony here, according to the literary tradition, in 733–732. For some reason, they had begun digging a shaft early in the settlement but the digging had been abandoned and the shaft filled with debris. It was then sealed over by a later terrace, so leaving a time capsule of stratified material datable to between 730 and 690 BC with the earliest finds at the bottom. No less than 191 pieces of pottery with inscriptions, graffiti, or marks of ownership have been found in the debris. Some of the inscriptions are simply symbolic markings, perhaps of ownership, but others, 25 of the 191, have letters from the alphabet with one, a drinking bowl (*skyphos*) belonging to one Hakesandros, carrying a fragment of a longer text. The pottery types show that many come within the Thermaic Gulf but others from eastern traders, perhaps even Phoenicians. The cache has provided crucial new evidence of the early use of the alphabet in this region and it shows that the Eretrians had their colony up and running as a trading centre almost immediately after they had settled there.

By the beginning of the seventh century Greeks were moving into the Dardanelles, the entrance to the Black Sea: Megara, a coastal city west of Athens, seems to have been the first. Her earliest settlement, Chalcedon, was on the Asian side of the straits. Native opposition may have made it easier for the Megarans to establish a position here before crossing to the much more favourable European side, where the city of Byzantium was founded about 660 BC. Byzantium's site was an outstanding one, with a headland, superb natural harbour, and good protection by the sea on the south. The city controlled the entrance to the Black Sea as well as enjoying fine fishing. A thousand years later the same site was to be chosen by the Roman emperor Constantine for his eastern capital, Constantinople, the modern Istanbul.

The Black Sea was not immediately welcoming to the Greeks. The native peoples around the shores—among them the Thracians, and the Scythians, with their reputation for human sacrifice—were hostile. The northern shores of the sea, which were the home of the best resources, had extremely cold winters. Although there is some literary evidence for settlement in the eighth century, there is little archaeological support for such an early date and it may have been the seventh century before the leading colonies were established. The two cities most responsible were Megara and, predominantly, Miletus, one of the cities of Asia Minor whose hinterland was under pressure from the expansion of Lydia. Once settlements were established they could exploit stocks of fish and land as well as hides and slaves. (Grain, from the northern

shores, only became a major import, to Athens, in the later fifth century.) Often Greeks settled within local communities. Herodotus (Book IV: 108) tells of Greek settlers among the Budini people, in what is now the Ukraine. Here, as in the west, Greek culture gradually became dominant. At the largest city, Gelonus, the settlers had gone native to the extent of speaking a mixture of Greek and Scythian but they had Greek-style temples and a festival to Dionysus. Greek goods have been found far up the river valleys in the Russian interior and Scythian art, like Etruscan, becomes heavily influenced by that of Greece. One Scythian king, Scyles, adopted a Greek lifestyle so enthusiastically that he was killed by his own outraged people when seen participating in Dionysiac revels.

The settling of Cyrene on the coast of north Africa by the Therans took place, after extensive searches for a good site, about 630. It was an unusual colony, one of the few to be established well inland. (Leontini in Sicily is another example.) This suggests that relations with the native population must have been good. This was not to last. There was massive opposition when the Greeks tried to introduce new settlers and dispossessed the natives in the process. However, Cyrene survived and became one of the richest areas of the Greek world. Apart from the natural resources of sheep, corn, and horses, the city had a monopoly of the silphium plant, now extinct but valued in the ancient world as a cure-all. (A particularly fine cup from Sparta (dated to c.550 BC) shows a ruler by the name of Arkesilas overseeing the weighing and packing of silphium.)

Excavations on the site of Cyrene have helped provide evidence of intermarriage between Greeks and natives. The first settlers on each site were probably men. Women from the founding *polis* may have followed them, but more likely the settlers intermarried with local women. A line of poetry by the Cyrenian poet Callimachus talks of the belted men of war dancing with the fair-haired Libyans, and in the cemeteries there is evidence of Libyan cult practices. Herodotus mentions that the women of Cyrene followed the Egyptian practice of not eating cows' meat, suggesting they were local people. Put together this evidence suggests that intermarriage was normal. In fact, it is hard to see how colonies could have expanded otherwise. (For Cyrene see now Philip Kenrick, *Cyrenaica*, London, 2013, chapter 6.)

The Lelantine War and the Emergence of Corinth

As has been seen, it was the island of Euboea, especially its two main cities, Eretria and Chalcis, which provided the impetus for early colonization. At the end of the eighth century, however, the relationship between the two cities broke down. The conflict seems to have centred on control of the rich Lelantine plain between their territories, and the war is known for this reason as the Lelantine War. Details of the war are very fragmentary, and like the Trojan War, it may even have been a later construct, but tradition tells how it drew in many cities of the Greek world. This may be a recognition that there were a number of festering disputes between cities and it took the Lelantine War to bring them into the open.

The war has been seen as a war of the old aristocratic Greece. The Euboeans had become involved in trade primarily to bolster their aristocratic elites and now the heroes from these fought out their battles. In a tone reminiscent of medieval chivalry, there was even an agreement (although only mentioned much later by the geographer Strabo) not to use ‘plebeian’ missiles such as arrows and javelins. A burial of a warrior hero at Eretria, dated to about 720 BC, has the ashes of the dead man wrapped in a cloth and placed with jewellery in a bronze cauldron. Around it were swords and spearheads and even the bones of what appears to have been a sacrificed horse. This is an echo of the same rituals surrounding the burial of the Homeric hero Patroclus. The *Iliad* may draw as much on the experience of this war as on the folk memories of those of Mycenaean Greece.

The war probably ended in the exhaustion of both of the leading cities, and it appears that the influence they retained was now exercised in different spheres of the Mediterranean. Eretria may have become associated with the colonial enterprises of her allies Megara and Miletus in the Black Sea, while Chalcis was now linked to Corinth. It was, in fact, the city of Corinth that emerged as the leading city of Greece after the war. Al-Mina, the trading-post patronized by the Euboeans, was sacked at this time by the Assyrians, and the archaeological record shows that when it was rebuilt it was Corinthian, not Euboean, pottery that predominated.

Corinth was not an old foundation, despite enjoying fertile land and having the shelter of Acrocorinth, the massive fortress rock that dominates the city. In the eighth century it was still a cluster of villages, but it then expanded quickly. It has been suggested (though the evidence is weak) that Corinth gained control of the Isthmus during the Lelantine War, seizing land from Megara, one of Eretria’s allies. This would have given her both timber and pasture but, more significantly, control of the main route from east to west as well as the only land route from the Peloponnese to the north. The sea voyage around the Peloponnese with its rocky coast was dangerous, and many seafarers preferred to drag their ships and goods across the Isthmus (on a specially constructed road-way, the *diolkos*, parts of which still survive). Under the Bacchiadae, a ruling clan of perhaps 200 households, who intermarried only with each other, and who selected one of their number to hold office as the chief magistrate, the *prytanis*, for a year, the city enjoyed fifty important years of stability and was able to exploit its position to the full.

In contrast to the more traditional parts of Greece where craftsmen were still despised, the Bacchiadae welcomed them and used their talents. One major industry was shipbuilding, carried out, probably by foreigners, at workshops on the coast. It seems that prospective colonists could charter their ships from Corinth, but the Corinthians also pioneered faster and more efficient warships. Their *pentekonters* were narrow and undecked, with the keel beam prolonged and fitted with bronze so that they could ram opponents. With such ships the Corinthians could challenge any merchantman. As mentioned above, they also kept close contact with their colonies, and it is possible in the late seventh century to speak of a Corinthian empire.

The most pervasive sign of Corinth’s dominance is the city’s pottery. It flooded the Greek world in the seventh century and its styles are so well known that many

sites can now be dated to within twenty-five or even ten years by the pottery found there. Most of it was in small domestic ware in the shape of perfume flasks (the perfume itself being another import from the east), jugs, and cups. Its decoration provides some of the best evidence for the spread of Oriental motifs. The city was far more responsive to the east than Athens was at this period, and, from about 725 BC, pots in the so-called Proto-Corinthian style are covered with animals, foliage, flowers, and rosettes. Human figures are less common, but one vase, the Chigi vase of about 650 BC, stands out for its magnificent representation of hoplites, armed foot soldiers, the new mass troops of the Greek world. Another innovation, from about the same date, is black-figure drawing, figures in black with details of their anatomy incised on them set against the natural buff background of the clay. It is a process that was probably learnt from eastern metalworkers and remained exclusive to Corinth until the Athenians adopted it a hundred years later (setting their black figures against an orange background). Corinthian dominance in the pottery world lasted into the sixth century when, for reasons not fully understood, it was supplanted by that of Athens (see further below, p. 191).

In the middle of the seventh century another part of the east became open to the Greeks. King Psammetichus (Psamtek) of Egypt, in the process of establishing the independence of his state from Assyria (p. 103), welcomed Greek mercenaries and later traders. For the Greeks the rich corn surplus of the Nile valley was the main attraction, but papyrus and linen were probably also a lure. In return the Greeks may have brought oil and wine, and silver, always rarer and more precious to the Egyptians than gold. The Greeks were given their own trading-post at Naucratis in the western Delta on a tributary of the Nile, and it appears to have been in operation by 620 BC. Soon Greeks were visiting Egypt not only as merchants but as awe-inspired tourists. The poetess Sappho's brother came as a merchant. (He was reputed to have fallen in love with a pricey courtesan in Naucratis.) Egypt was seen as the fount of traditional wisdom, and some Greeks even mistakenly believed it to have been the origin of their own culture.

Archilochus and Life on the Frontier

The world of the seventh century was a fluid one, a frontier society in which the Greeks were expanding among new peoples and influences but one in which they survived with an increased sense of confidence. It is lucky that, as a complement to the mounds of pottery and the bronze luxury goods, a few voices of the period survive to breath life into this distant age. The poet Archilochus, for instance, gives a vivid picture of life in a new colony. He was illegitimate, from the relatively barren island of Paros (its famous marble was not yet being exploited), and set out with his father and a band of settlers in the early seventh century to colonize the north Aegean island of Thasos.

It was a primitive and harsh world he found there. The colony was under threat from both native Thracians and rival settlers. It was not a world of heroic values but

one in which the struggle for survival was paramount. Archilochus mentions how he once threw away his shield when in flight, an unheard-of humiliation for a Homeric hero, and he talks of his distaste for the strutting commanders with their neatly shaven chins. A tough down-to-earth soldier was worth much more in the kind of everyday crisis the settlers faced.

Archilochus was direct and earthy in his passions. He conceived a love for the daughter of one of his fellow settlers but her father refused him. His invective was immediate:

May he lose his way on the cold sea
 And swim to the heathen Salmydessos,
 May the ungodly Thracians with their hair
 Done up in a fright on the top of their heads
 Grab him, that he knows what it is to be alone
 Without friend and family. May he eat slaves' bread
 And suffer the plague and freeze naked,
 Laced about with the nasty trash of the sea.
 May his teeth knock the top on the bottom
 As he lies on his face, spitting brine,
 At the edge of the cold sea, like a dog.
 And all this it would be a privilege to watch,
 Giving me great satisfaction as it would
 For he took back the word he gave in honour,
 Over the salt and table at a friendly meal.

(Translation: Guy Davenport)

He even spread the tale that Lycambes, the father, and his daughter committed suicide as a result of the hatred and humiliation he threw at them.

The eighth and seventh centuries were a period of rapid change. The old aristocratic Greek values were now under siege from a world where initiative and good luck were valued. The expansion of the Greek world offered new opportunities for those whose lives had been frustrated by poverty back home. The opportunities were keenly exploited. From being culturally open to the east Greece had now absorbed its example and was spreading its own culture throughout the Mediterranean world. With it came exciting opportunities for new trade. The feeling of success flowed back into mainland Greece and the citizens of its cities. Gradually they were emerging as political communities.

INTERLUDE 2

Sappho and Lyric Poetry

Archilochus introduces a new world of poetry, that of the lyric. At its simplest the term means no more than a song accompanied by the lyre. The lyric must have originated in the songs, now vanished, of everyday life in Dark Age Greece—wedding songs, harvest songs, work songs. It is tied in with the world of the present, in contrast to the epic, which is set in the world of the past, a world where gods and supermen act out their heroic exploits. Lyrics also bring out the personal voice of the poet. In the words of Peter Conrad, ‘The lyric protagonist is not a man who does things but to whom things happen . . . if the epic is a social act, the lyric is a personal testimony, the lyric is the interior of epic, it testifies to the vulnerability of the character inside the armour.’ Archilochus and his abandoned shield comes to mind. Perhaps one can see here the birth of the individual voice in western literature.

There is probably no one reason why the seventh century is an age of lyric poetry. It may reflect a period of confusion in which the collective memories exploited by the traditional singer as he moved from hearth to hearth have been shattered. The poet without a common culture to draw on is thrown back as an individual on to his own resources. Certainly Archilochus speaks straight from his heart and has no time for conventions of behaviour and courteous living. His is the voice of one man against a hostile world.

A more penetrating analysis, by the classics professor Leslie Kurke and others, tries to pinpoint the arenas in which lyric poetry was performed as, whatever the personal frustrations of Archilochus, the lyrics must have been sung to a receptive audience. One arena was the *symposium*, the cultivated dinner party, where perhaps fifteen members, *hetairoi*, ‘intimate companions’, celebrated a culture which was unashamedly aristocratic, attracted to sensuality, the luxury of the east, and the refinements of civilized living. Some vases from the late sixth and early fifth centuries show dinner guests dressed up as if they were Lydians, by tradition the most flamboyant of the eastern peoples. Yet this class feels that its treasured way of life is under attack from the rising ‘middle classes’ of the cities. Poets such as Alcaeus, an early sixth-century lyricist from Mytilene on the island of Lesbos, ridicule the upstarts who have taken over the city with their insincere promises and willingness to drive Alcaeus’ class into exile. The sixth-century Megaran Theognis bemoans how the uncouth outsiders have now replaced the aristocracy as ‘the good’. The ‘retreat’ into the private world of the *symposium* is telling—in the past the aristocracy would have maintained its status by throwing public feasts.

However, the lyricists can also abuse these overdressed and arrogant individuals. In contrast to the closed world of the *symposia* is the *agora*, the market-place, where citizen assemblies and public debates take place. Another lyricist, Xenophanes, ridicules the sauntering aristocrats who arrive in the *agora*, in purple cloaks, reeking of unguents and flaunting their luxuriant hair. The implication is that they contribute nothing to society. Archilochus with his contempt for the strutting commanders echoes the disdain. In one of his elegies, the seventh-century Spartan Tyrtaeus proclaims that wealth, success in the games, noble birth, or a melodious voice, all the qualities lauded by the aristocrats, mean nothing if a man cannot stand firm amidst the slaughter of war.

In short, lyrics become a medium through which cultural conflicts are fought out and provide a vivid if fragmented (so many of the lyrics are incomplete) picture of what was clearly an important moment of transition from an aristocracy who seemed to have lost the respect of the citizenry by their boorish and effete behaviour to a citizen-run community where commitment and steadfastness count.

If sensuality is the attribute that helps define the lyrics of the elite, then there is a secure place for Sappho, the most memorable of the lyric poets. Sappho was born about 620 BC into an aristocratic family of Lesbos: Alcaeus, her fellow Mytilenean, was a contemporary. At one point her family was driven into exile—to Sicily. On her return Sappho appears to have become the mentor or teacher of a band of young women dedicated to the worship of Aphrodite. They were enjoying a transitional period in their lives before going on to marry. It is understandable that the feelings within the group would have become intense and perhaps sexual, but there is also a story that Sappho married and had a daughter. A legend says that she committed suicide by throwing herself off a cliff when rejected by a man she loved. She died about 570 BC.

Sappho has intrigued later generations as much because of her sexual feelings as her poetry. The nineteenth-century prejudices against eastern influence on the Greeks have already been mentioned. These prejudices went deeper. The Greeks were expected to be not only culturally pure but also sexually pure. Scholars, for instance, found it difficult to imagine that Greeks may have enjoyed a wide variety of bisexual experiences without guilt and they misread or ignored the evidence that suggested otherwise. Speaking of Sappho, the Oxford classicist Richard Jenkyns quotes some of the reactions of nineteenth-century scholars to the suggestion that the poetess may have been a practising lesbian. 'It is clear that Sappho was a respectable person in Lesbos,' one puts it rather primly, while another talks assuredly of her virgin purity: 'although imbued with a fine perception of the beautiful and brilliant she preferred conscious rectitude to every other source of human enjoyment.'

Only one complete poem of Sappho's survives. It is a hymn to the goddess Aphrodite in which the poet calls on the goddess in terms of easy intimacy to help soothe her love for another woman. Once again, she tells the goddess, she has got into an emotional mess and needs help. This is typical of Sappho. She comes across as a person of intense and unguarded emotions. It is her vulnerability that is one of her main attractions ('Love, looser of limbs, shakes me again, a sweet-bitter resistless

creature', as one fragment runs). In the best known of her poems she describes her feelings when a woman she is attracted to is wooed by a young man:

Peer of immortal gods he seems to me, that
 Man who sits beside you, who now can listen
 Private and close, so close, to your sweet-sounding
 Voice and your lovely
 Passionate laughter—ah, how that, as ever,
 Sets the heart pounding in my breast; one glance and
 I am undone, speech fails me, I can no longer
 Utter a word, my
 Tongue cleaves to my mouth, while sharp and sudden
 Flames lick through me, burning the inward flesh, and
 Sight's eclipsed in my eyes, a clamorous humming
 Rings through my eardrums;
 Cold sweat drenches down me, shuddering spasms
 Rack my whole frame, a greener-than-grassy pallor
 Holds me, till I seem a hair's breath only
 This side of dying.
 Yet all must be ventured, all endured, since . . .

(Translation: Peter Green)

Sappho's feelings for the natural world are as sensual as her feelings for people. In the poem known as Fragment II, Sappho calls Aphrodite to an orchard where cool water runs through the apple trees, alongside a meadow of spring flowers and gracious breezes. As Richard Jenkyns suggests, the sounds of many of the words she uses, *keladei*, for running water, *tethumiamamanoi*, for the perfumed smoke rising from a sacrifice, *aithussomenon*, for the sparkling of light on moving leaves, combine with their meaning to create the mood of sensuous languor.

Sappho is important as the rare and unrestrained voice of a woman in this period. While, as has been seen in Homer's epics, aristocratic women are given some status, she is still marginal, occupied solely with other women, here young girls. Ultimately it is the demands of marriage that take them away from their secluded world and so they must pass away from the intimate relationships they have enjoyed with each other. Sappho is the supreme recorder of loss and unfulfilled desire in this bittersweet moment of youthful freedom.

The Hoplite Army

Young and old alike weep for him,
 and the whole city is filled with a sad longing,
 and a tomb and children and his family survive him.
 Never has fame forgotten a brave man or his name,
 But though he is under the earth he becomes immortal,
 whosoever excelling, and standing firm, and fighting
 for his land and children, is killed by mighty Ares.

(Translation: Oswyn Murray. Ares was a Greek god of war.)

The Spartan poet Tyrtaeus is here applauding those who died in the line of battle defending the *polis*. Sparta, as will be seen, may have been unusual in its obsession with warfare but every Greek settlement was preoccupied with its survival. Cities fought over plains, over trade routes, over their borders. As most were relatively poor there were special problems in conducting these struggles. There was no question of a city affording a standing army, so farmers had to double as soldiers. The result was the hoplite army drawn from the richer peasants, perhaps the wealthiest third of a city's population. The word 'hoplite' may come directly from *hoplon*, a heavy shield with a hoop at the centre, through which the arm would go, and a grip on the rim, but more likely it simply describes someone who is armed. The hoplites could provide their own 'uniform', bronze helmet, shield, cuirass, and greaves, with a sword and stabbing spear as weapons (and possibly afford to employ labour while they were in training or fighting). Early examples of these weapons and armour survive that have been dated to between 720 and 650. The Chigi vase of c.650 BC now in the Villa Giulia, the Etruscan museum in Rome, shows fully armed hoplites clashing in battle so the transition from aristocratic hero warfare must have been effected by then.

The hoplites were trained to fight in rows, one formed up behind the other, making a phalanx. The men of each row either linked their shields together and advanced with spears held over their heads or held their shields on the left and carried

their spears under their right arms. Cooperation was vital because each soldier depended on the next in line using his shield for protection. Manoeuvring forward to the accompaniment of a piper with suitably bloodcurdling yells, the phalanx must have relied heavily on impact. Cavalry were useless against such a force, unless they could strike from the side. The horses were too vulnerable, and riders, still without stirrups at this time, would easily have been knocked off. Any traditional warrior heroes of the old school would simply have been trampled underfoot. The only effective counter-force was another group of hoplites, and this explains why hoplite armies spread throughout the Greek world from the seventh century onwards.

Although the Chigi vase shows one neatly ordered phalanx clashing with another, it is doubted whether the hoplite armies were uniform in the way that a modern army might be. Not everyone would have been able to afford the same quality of equipment and it also seems likely that the aristocrats who were concerned with maintaining their status fought in the front row. The Spartan Tyrtaeus certainly assumes that there is a special glory for those young who die in the front line. Heroism is no longer shown through the epic battles between individuals that predominate in Homer but now involves setting a good example in the phalanx. For Tyrtaeus this was fighting up front, 'placing foot against foot, pushing shield against shield, and interlocking crest with crest, helmet with helmet, and chest with chest'. This aggressive approach, he says, will help protect the people behind and nothing is more shameful than being found dead on the battlefield with a spearhead in one's back, a sign that one has broken and run. Tyrtaeus describes other, less noble, hoplites who stand out of the range of missiles protecting themselves with their shields. (It was common to hold hoplites in reserve to fill in any gaps when the line was broken but they could hardly have earned much respect.) Certainly the ranks behind the front were considered of lesser value and it is even suggested that the more reluctant soldiers were placed in the middle so that they could be prodded forward by those behind!

The normal hoplite engagement was a low level affair with a few hundred men on each side. It was primarily aimed at making a show of strength against neighbours, and the actual capture of a rival city would normally have been beyond the hoplites' capabilities. Once two sides met they would shove into each other and then prod and slash until one side gave way. (The most vulnerable parts of the anatomy were the groin, open to a stab under the shield, and the neck.) The successful army would then raid its opponents' crops. A large battle was rare. The Spartans fought no more than four between 479 and 474 BC while the historian Thucydides only records two during the entire course of the Peloponnesian War 431–404 BC. At the first Battle of Mantinea (418), described by Thucydides as 'the greatest battle for some time', 18,000 men might have been involved. Only about 1,400 appear to have died (300 of these on the victorious Spartan side).

Thucydides says that the Spartan custom was to fight long and hard during a battle but not to spend much time in pursuit, the time when massacres of the defeated enemy would have been easiest. (It would have been difficult, in any case, to travel far in hoplite armour.) Hoplite warfare was perhaps more to do with the assertion

of the identity and pride of a city than with killing for its own sake. Polybius, the second-century BC Greek historian whose major work was an examination of why the Romans defeated the Greeks (see below p. 391), tells how the Greeks 'made public declarations to each other about wars and battles in advance, when they decided to risk them, and even about the places into which they were about to advance and draw up their lines'. In other words, there were well-understood rituals within which combat took place. (These were to break down towards the end of the fifth century, see Chapter 18.)

Effective hoplite armies had to be well trained. Anyone who fell over in a charge, or got his spear tangled up, would have caused chaos in the tightly knit ranks. Morale was important, and each side would have had its own methods of building up courage, just as with a modern football team before a match. According to Thucydides, the Spartans before Mantinea 'sang war songs and exchanged words of individual encouragement reminding each other of their proven courage'. However, as Tyrtaeus suggests, it was the power of shame that was crucial, certainly in Sparta. A body carried back on a shield was infinitely preferable to a defeated man returning home on foot. He would be shunned by the community.

Later sources, Aristotle is one, suggest that the experience of fighting together helped create a common sense of class that isolated the aristocrats and so helped create a citizen community. However, if battles were indeed rare, it is unlikely that the hoplite experience was so profound as to have a political impact. Again, so long as aristocrats could maintain their status within the rows of the hoplite phalanx then there would be no need for a political conflict between hoplites and aristocracy. On the other hand some societies, such as Sparta, enshrined military valour so deeply into the consciousness of its citizens that the maintenance of status through fighting became embedded in the political process itself (see further below, p. 169).

The Tyrants

Aristocratic prominence had been founded first on the ideal of the warrior chief, capable of great feats of arms, and, secondly, on control of land (without which the warrior role could not have been sustained). Noble birth also counted and aristocratic clans were often bound together through a common lineage. The more fragmented world of the seventh century, with its creation of new communities and the steady growth of trade, released new energies that undermined aristocratic power. Some cities managed to adapt peacefully to the challenge of these new forces. The Bacchiadae of Corinth provide an excellent example of a self-regulated group, based on their lineage as 'descendants of Heracles', who maintained power through the successful sharing of magistracies. A government where power was in the hands of an aristocratic council or shared between aristocratic families could be broadened to include citizens of wealth or those who provided military service.

In many cities, however, the tensions were not contained or defused. In Aegean Greece in particular, in the century after 650 BC a succession of city governments were overthrown by ambitious individuals who exploited popular resentments with the aristocracy to seize power. These were the tyrants. Corinth was the first tyranny, followed by its neighbours Sicyon and Megara. The earliest Athenian tyrant was Peisistratus, who seized power permanently, after several abortive attempts, in 546. There were tyrannies on the Aegean islands, Samos and Naxos, for instance, and in the Ionian cities of the coast of Asia Minor.

The word *tyrannos*, 'tyrant', is another of those Greek words that originate in the east, possibly from Lydia. Originally it may have meant no more than a ruler, but as Greek democracy developed and all forms of one-man rule became abhorrent the Greeks themselves gave the word the connotations that still surround it today. The use of an imported word implies that the Greeks saw the 'tyrants' as distinct from other forms of 'one-man' rule they might have experienced, such as the hereditary king, the *basileus*. In the very limited later sources that survive, tyrants are often portrayed in a stereotypical way, with their individualism and lack of restraint contrasted with the cooperative behaviour expected of the 'ideal' citizen. Among their excesses were sexual ones. Intercourse with a dead wife and with a mother are among those aberrations recorded. Once the stereotype had developed, it was there to project on later rulers. Philip and Alexander of Macedon are branded as tyrants in fourth-century Athens and there is an echo of such a projection in the assassination of Julius Caesar (see p. 438). Once the stereotype is acknowledged to be a later development, however, it becomes clear that not all tyrants of the seventh and sixth centuries were particularly oppressive. Many glorified their cities and were important patrons of the arts—although the evidence suggests that tyrants did tend to become tyrannical with time.

Several factors may have encouraged the rise of tyrants. The new overseas settlements provided a different model of society, one that showed that an aristocracy was dispensable (although there are cases in the western cities where aristocracies did emerge), and which provided opportunities for those with ambition. The growth of trade and the rise of new interest groups may have increased social tensions. Interestingly, however, from what little is known about the origins of individual tyrants, it does not appear that they were necessarily drawn from a class of new rich. Many, in fact, seem to have been men of aristocratic birth who for some reason or other had found themselves excluded from power. In the Ionian cities of Asia Minor a tyrant may have been no more than a leader of an aristocratic faction in conflict with others. In other cases there are hints that a tyrant had a successful military background before seizing power, and in this case he may have been the direct representative of the hoplites or at least able to call on the loyalties of men he may have led. In other cases Aristotle notes the power of their rhetoric and their ability to 'win the people's confidence by slandering the notables'. The general pattern is, therefore, of determined individuals, ready to manipulate traditional or non-traditional means of support to take power unconstitutionally. The implication is that aristocratic oligarchies refused to give way and no other alternative

method of political change was available. Yet the overthrow was often destructive. In Mytilene, the tyrant Theagenes, who came to power c.640, slaughtered the cattle of the rich and there are reports of mobs storming into aristocratic households and demanding that they be given banquets! No wonder the lyric poets Sappho and Alcaeus sing of the aristocrats having to flee the city.

One of the best-recorded examples of tyranny is that of Cypselus at Corinth. By the mid-seventh century there were signs that the vigour of the Bacchiadae was weakening. They lost control of their colony Corcyra (on the modern Corfu) and proved unable to prevent the rise of the neighbouring cities of Argos and Megara. They were losing credibility. The legends suggest that Cypselus' mother was of the Bacchiadae clan, but as she was lame she had been forced to marry outside the clan, thus depriving her son of any chance of a share in political power. This may provide a reason for his determination for revenge. Other sources suggest he may have built up popular support as a military commander at a time when Corinth's forces needed boosting. Whatever the truth, about 657 BC he overthrew the Bacchiadae, sent the clan into exile, and shrewdly distributed their land among his supporters.

Cypselus appears to have had a realistic approach to power. Like many tyrants, he appreciated the need to win, or at least to be seen to be winning, the support of the gods, and he made rich dedications at both Delphi and Olympia. At home he glorified himself and his dynasty through temple building. Many of the features of Doric architecture, so widely copied throughout the mainland and the Greek west, originated in Corinth (possibly as the result of contact with Egypt: see p. 188). Cypselus and his son Periander, who succeeded him peacefully thirty years later, also successfully boosted the commercial wealth of the city. Corinthian settlements extended into the northern Aegean and the Adriatic, and were kept under closer control than the colonies of any other Greek city, sharing coinage and even having their magistrates sent out from Corinth. The influence of one trading partner, Egypt, was such that Periander called his nephew Psammetichus, after the Egyptian king.

As other tyrannies appeared in the Greek world, Cypselus and his successors built up links with them. It was almost as if the tyrants felt themselves members of an exclusive club. They would help each other seize and maintain power. Sometimes two tyrants would make a friendship that transcended a traditional hostility between two cities. Periander of Corinth and Thrasybulus of Miletus provide one example. This might suggest the vulnerability of the tyrants but, contrary to the stereotype of the unrestrained despot, some did recognize the rule of law. In Sicily, on the Corinthian gulf, the tyrant Orthagoras was a rare example of a man who had worked his way up from the bottom. He is recorded as being the son of a cook whose prestige came from his qualities as a fighter and later military commander. The dynasty persisted and his grandson Cleisthenes (whose grandson of the same name was to play a crucial role in Athenian democracy) was even more successful as a general, expanding his city's territory and challenging the growing power of Argos. He knew how to act on the Panhellenic stage and entered the winning teams for the four-horse chariot races at Delphi (582) and Olympia (576). In effect he was

acting as an aristocrat and his rule seems too restrained to fit into the normal picture of a 'tyranny'. Aristotle records that the dynasty 'treated their subjects moderately and in many respects enslaved themselves to the laws'.

Similarly on the island of Samos the 'tyranny' of Polycrates, 538–522, was more of a flamboyant glorification of the island than a dictatorship. Polycrates had recruited a group of hoplites to help him overthrow what seems to have been a discredited aristocracy. He closed down the wrestling grounds where aristocrats traditionally met but did little more in the way of repression. His building works won the admiration of the historian Herodotus. A long dam was built against the harbour entrance to give it added protection and water was brought into the city through an aqueduct that ran a thousand metres under the city from a reservoir. His fellow citizens supported him, apart from a few disgruntled aristocrats, among them one Pythagoras who left for exile in Italy (see below p. 198). Polycrates then tried to exercise supremacy over the Aegean. His pretensions aroused suspicion, from Sparta and Corinth on the mainland, and from the Persians who feared a strong Greek power on the coastline of Asia Minor. It was a Persian satrap who lured Polycrates onto the mainland, captured and tortured him to death, and displayed the body on the mainland opposite Samos. To his own people Polycrates may not have been tyrannical but by attempting to create an empire, he certainly was in the eyes of other Greeks.

Ultimately tyranny could not be sustained within the city. While Cypselus is recorded as moving freely in Corinth, his successor, Periander, was forced to use a bodyguard. He is seen as the archetype of the wicked tyrant. Herodotus recounts lurid stories of him killing his wife and attempting to castrate 300 noble youths of Corcyra (Corfu), a Bacchiadae stronghold. (The purpose was to send them in this mutilated form as a gift to Periander's ally, Alyattes, king of Lydia.) When the tyranny entered a third generation under Psammetichus it was doomed. Psammetichus was assassinated some four years after coming to power, in about 582 BC. In the neighbouring city of Sicyon tyranny was similarly overthrown in 555. By 550, with the exception of Athens, where the Peisistratid tyranny lasted until 510, tyrannies were a thing of the past on mainland Greece. They lasted longer in Asia Minor.

For all their efforts to boost trade and glorify their cities, the tyrants never succeeded in creating an ideology of leadership that inspired loyalty from one generation to the next. Once a tyrant became a petty dictator or time dimmed the glamour of a young popular leader, there was no tradition able to sustain tyrannical rule. In many ways tyranny can be seen as the last magnificent gestures of aristocrats who had eclipsed their fellows in pursuit of personal glory. There was no attempt to enforce more progressive policies, such as redistributing land or creating constitutions. So the tyrants always found difficulty in keeping the sustained support of the mass of citizenry. When tyrannies collapsed, a body of citizens who were committed to their city remained in place to take over.

This was the crucial point. As individual tyrants were overthrown, Greek city life might have degenerated into civil war between rival factions. In fact, the tyrants

were usually replaced by oligarchies or even democracies. The *polis*, as has been said, was not simply a set of buildings. It was a community of citizens who shared a range of experiences, in the army, in kinship groups, in age-classes, and marriage alliances. The result was a continual round of gatherings that served to reinforce the cohesion of the citizen community (or at least its adult males), and it was precisely this cohesion that the tyrants failed to break down or exploit for their own benefit. It was natural that the government of the city itself should devolve onto part or even the whole of the citizen body in the shape of oligarchical (Greek *oligos*: few; *archos*: ruler) or democratic (Greek *demos*: people; *kratia*: power) rule. It was also natural that the citizen community should define itself in contrast to the outsider. As a male body, it segregated and secluded the female. As a body of free men, it felt no inhibitions about reinforcing this status by consolidating slavery. As Moses Finley put it, 'one aspect of Greek history is the advance, hand in hand, of liberty and slavery'. The misdeeds of the tyrants, some certainly exaggerated for effect, helped define the democrat.

Sparta

The ways in which the hoplite class adapted to changing political conditions can be seen in the history of the two most important cities of the Greek mainland in this period, Sparta and Athens. Neither were typical city-states. Each had, in differing ways, access to far more resources than the smaller cities, and as a result both were able to act on a wider stage. They played a dominant role in the Persian Wars of the early fifth century and then, perhaps inevitably, they became locked into deadly conflict with each other in the Peloponnesian War of 431–404 BC, a war in which Sparta emerged victorious before collapsing a few years later from exhaustion. (For an introduction to Sparta, see Paul Cartledge, *The Spartans: An Epic History*, London, 2002.)

In popular imagination, especially that of the Athenians, Sparta has been seen as a conservative and rigid society, dedicated to keeping order over its population and placing success in war above all other values. Education was confined to rigorous training and the instilling of patriotic virtue. This was the image of Sparta that persisted through into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. When the French revolutionaries were designing a new education system for their 'Republic of Virtue' it was the Spartan they took as a model. In England, Sparta inspired some aspects of the English public school system. Beatings and rough games were acceptable parts of the system, which would finally produce reserved but steady citizens. (Richard Jenkyns describes these attitudes well in his *The Victorians and Ancient Greece*, Oxford and Cambridge, Mass., 1980.) It is hardly surprising that Hitler was an admirer of the Spartans. This image may be too much of a stereotype but the limited sources make it hard to discover the reality.

The city of Sparta lay along a series of low hills overlooking the river Eurotas in the south-eastern Peloponnese. Its immediate territory is known as Laconia or

Lacedaemonia, a name recorded in the Linear B tablets. The site had good natural defences, and no city wall was built around it until Roman times. The city had originated as a number of scattered villages. It never had the great public buildings enjoyed by other cities and it is now a desolate place to visit. When the villages were joined to form a city-state some form of compromise must have been hammered out between two ruling families. The result was that Sparta was left with two hereditary kings. These played heavily on their mythical descent from the hero Heracles whose descendants, the Heraclides, it was said had regained their ancient territory in Laconia in association with a so-called Dorian invasion. They held a whole range of traditional powers and privileges, but by the sixth century their most important role was as religious leaders and as commanders of the Spartan armies. They were also members of a largely aristocratic body of thirty councillors, the *gerousia*, elders elected by the citizen body by acclamation from those who had reached the age of 60. As in most cities, there was also a citizen assembly. Its role appears to have been consultative, listening to proposals put forward by the kings or elders and approving or disapproving them.

At some point in her history Sparta began subduing surrounding villages. Although their inhabitants, known as the *perioikoi* ('those living around' i.e. on less fertile hill-land), were totally dependent on Sparta, they retained their settlements, enjoyed some aspects of local government, and were free to engage in crafts and manufacturing. They were seen to be part of a wider Lacedaemonian community and even provided their own contingents for the Spartan army. However, those living outside the central villages that made up the core of Sparta were given no political rights. By the eighth century the city was looking further afield, across Mount Taygetus to Messenia to the west. The motives for the expansion are unclear. The land was rich but Sparta had already enough to meet her needs in the valleys of Laconia and conquest of Messenia left her with a less defensible boundary. It may have been more a matter of defining an identity through successful war. After twenty years of fighting in the late eighth century, Messenia too was subdued. Tradition tells of the harsh treatment of the native population, the helots, possibly 'those who have been taken'. It does appear that by the sixth century the helots were in some form of bondage to the Spartans and they were portrayed as a continual threat to their owners. Sparta was now the largest *polis* in Greece, controlling two-fifths of the Peloponnese and, at 8,000 square kilometres, its territory twice as large as the next largest, the Sicilian city of Syracuse.

It was clear from the start that the Spartan hold on Messenia was a precarious one, not only because the native population did not take to its fate easily but also because Spartan expansion aroused the suspicion of neighbours. One of these was the city of Argos to the north-east of Sparta. There are hints in the literary sources that Argos may have been the first city to use hoplites (the earliest known hoplite helmet, of about 725 BC, has been found there). According to a much later source, the Argive army, perhaps exploiting its superiority, inflicted a traumatic military defeat on Sparta at Hysiae in 669. If so, Sparta must have been shaken to the core, especially when there is also evidence of a rebellion in Messenia that took another twenty years to subdue.

It was probably during these years that, as a response to these crises, the Spartan constitution became oligarchic. The only evidence for the development is a passage by Plutarch, written many centuries later, but probably drawing on a work by Aristotle on the Spartan constitution. It involved a *rhētra*, or pronouncement, that was attributed to a (possibly legendary) lawgiver, Lycurgus, and which claimed to have had the approval of the oracle at Delphi. The passage is difficult to interpret but it appears that the citizen assembly had acquired some kind of sovereignty in decision-making although, the passage goes on, when this was abused the kings and the elders had the right to overrule decisions. What the passage does not say is that the assembly also had the power to elect annually five *ephoroi*, ephors, from among the citizen body. The ephors were responsible for maintaining the overall good order of the state from day to day, in particular through scrutinizing the activities of the kings. They alone, when sitting on their official seats, had the right to not stand up in the presence of the king. Every month they renewed their loyalty to the kings in return for the kings' promise to respect the laws of the state. In short this was a balanced constitution, in which kings, elders, ephors, and the assembly each had a role to play. It is certainly the first known in Greece.

Alongside political change came social change. If the city was to survive it had to build a hoplite army of its own, and here Sparta had a distinct advantage over other Greek cities. The *perioikoi* and the helots could provide for the economic needs of the state and so this left the entire male citizen body free for war. Unlike other cities, where hoplites formed a richer minority drawn from the citizen body, in Sparta all male citizens were hoplites by virtue of their citizenship. There is evidence that the change took place under aristocratic supervision. The tightly disciplined hoplite ranks were very different from the old aristocratic warrior bands, yet in Sparta the same terminology was used to describe them both. The messes in which the soldiers ate were made up of fifteen men, the same number as in an aristocratic 'symposium'. It seems, therefore, that aristocratic cultural forms continued to be dominant. Certainly, once the second Messenian war was over and the city relaxed in what was a period of peace and prosperity, this is the impression that remains. There was widespread trade with the east, and bronze craters (mixing-bowls, one of the main symbols of aristocratic conviviality) from the city are found as far afield as France and southern Russia. (The Vix crater may be one of them (see p. 154.)) Spartan athletes dominated the Olympic Games throughout the seventh century. The *gerousia* remained an integral and influential part of the political system.

It was not to last. There were pressures on Spartan society that gradually destroyed the possibility of aristocratic lifestyles. It can be sensed in the word the Spartans used of themselves, *homoioi*, 'those who are similar'. Uniformity was imposed upon them by fear, the continuous threat of revolt by those they had subjugated. The Spartan state became heavily militarized, with every aspect of the life of its male citizens defined from the moment of birth. This was hoplite society at its most extreme, the subjugation of individual identity into the service of the state. In the sixth century there was a dramatic increase in the number of hoplite figures offered as votive offerings at the shrine of Artemis Orthia. One measure of the citizen's

commitment to the state was the need to provide a monthly ration to the communal dining tables, and this goes hand in hand with the intensification of farming, the land owned by Spartans but worked by the helots. So developed an egalitarian society that rested on the rigid exploitation of others. (See Chapter 14 for a fuller discussion of Spartan society.)

It was only to be expected that such a conservative society should gradually isolate itself from the outside world. Few Spartan victors are recorded in the Olympic Games after 570 BC. Trade contracted as the state moved towards self-sufficiency. Iron bars were retained as currency by the Spartans long after the rest of the Greek world had moved on to silver coins. There was also an idealization of the past, and, in the sixth century, the Spartans even went so far as to associate themselves with Agamemnon, the legendary leader of the Greeks in the Trojan War. The constitution was given a hallowed status that protected it against reform. The bringing of *eunomia*, good order, was prized as its main achievement. The rituals of Sparta, those relating to the succession of the king, for instance, were also unlike anything known elsewhere in the Greek world and the funerals of the kings were lavish occasions.

The morale of the Spartan citizens (as with that of the subjects of any totalitarian state) needed to be maintained by continual mobilization. The city was not always successful. In about 560 BC at the Battle of Fetters against the city of Tegea in southern Arcadia (it was called this because the Spartans marched out with fetters with which to enslave the Tegeans when they had been overcome), it was Sparta who was defeated. She now acted in a more restrained way. When Tegea was eventually conquered she was maintained as a dependent city, but not, like previous conquests, incorporated into the Spartan state. In the 540s Sparta had her revenge on Argos and extended her influence into the eastern Peloponnese. She was now the most powerful state in the peninsula. Even Corinth was prepared to accept her dominance, partly because Argos, for centuries the most powerful city of the eastern Peloponnesian coast, had been an enemy of hers too. The cities of the northern Peloponnese were encouraged to form alliances with Sparta. As Sparta had eliminated the possibility of tyranny for herself she helped to overthrow those who had tyrants and forced them to adopt an oligarchical model instead.

With her position secure in the north, Sparta's ambitions now extended across the Isthmus. She continued to champion oligarchy against tyranny. In 524, with the help of Corinth's navy, she tried, unsuccessfully, to overthrow Polycrates, tyrant of Samos. In 510 and again in 508 Spartan troops were to be found intervening against the tyranny of the Peisistratids of Athens. Sparta's interventions were motivated not just by her hatred of local tyrannies. She was increasingly conscious, as was all Greece, of the looming power of Persia. Embassies had come from several peoples outside Greece, the Lydians, the Scythians, and Egyptians, asking for help, but Sparta had been unable to save any of them from Persian expansionism. Persia, as a monarchy, aligned herself naturally with the tyrants of the Greek world and Sparta found herself left as the most powerful defender of Greek freedom and independence.

Sparta may have appeared powerful to the outside world but in fact her strength was limited. There were several factors that inhibited a forceful foreign policy. First, she never became a major sea power and this restricted her ability to act beyond the Greek mainland. At the same time she always remained vulnerable at home. The helots were not like the slaves of a typical Greek city who had no common heritage. Those in Messenia, at least, had a shared culture and experience of oppression. A revolt which took place while the Spartan armies were abroad would have been catastrophic, and Spartan leaders never forgot the possibility that it might happen.

There was also the question of leadership. A king who left the Peloponnese in search of military glory abroad risked upsetting the delicately balanced constitution at home. This became clear during the reign of king Cleomenes (520–490 BC). Once out of his city and with an army under his command, Cleomenes became increasingly assertive. After 510 he tried to define Spartan policy towards Athens and her ruling families with such high-handedness that even Sparta's allies balked. In 494 he crushed a reviving Argos with such brutality (6,000 Argives were reputedly burnt alive in a wood) that his city feared the revenge of the gods for this act of *hubris* (overweening pride). Faced with the opposition of his fellow king Demaratus, Cleomenes had him deposed. When Cleomenes finally returned to Sparta he was soon dead, presumably liquidated by the oligarchy. From now on the Spartans would be reluctant to let a king out of sight.

Sparta's power was limited in another way. There was no way she could hold down the entire Peloponnese. Her policy of alliances with the northern cities showed she recognized this. However, if she was to expand across the Isthmus she had to cross their territories. At first, and typically, Cleomenes acted as if the allies would simply do what he wanted. When, however, in 506, Cleomenes' plans for another attack on Athens were resisted, notably by Corinth, the Spartans were forced to compromise. They had to accept becoming part of a federation, known to historians as the Peloponnesian League. The League was clearly under the dominance of Sparta, who had the largest and best-trained army, but its structure included a council of all member states, each with one vote. A majority could prevent any military action proposed by Sparta (as happened in 440 when the Spartan assembly voted for war with Athens but was overruled by the League). The League was an early example of inter-state cooperation. It survived (until as late as 366) because no member state could stand up to Sparta, while Sparta was increasingly dependent on the allies' manpower.

Athens in the Sixth Century

As has been seen, one of Cleomenes' expeditions, that of 510, was to overthrow the Peisistratid tyranny in Athens. Athens was to be the focus for Sparta's hostility for over a century, first as a tyranny and then as the Greek world's leading exponent of democracy. Both were inimical to the *eunomia*, good order, sustained by an oligarchical government, which was the ideal of Sparta and her allies.

Archaeologists have found signs of the occupation of the Acropolis, which dominates the city of Athens, as early as 5000 BC, and the rock had been a stronghold of the Mycenaeans. As Mycenaean civilization collapsed in the twelfth century, Athens and its surrounding area, Attica, survived the worst of the turmoil. Occupation of the Acropolis was uninterrupted, and the inhabitants of Attica later prided themselves on their pure and undisturbed racial heritage. The area was also the springboard for the Ionian migrations (see p. 128), and links, real or imagined, with the Ionian communities of Asia Minor continued to be a factor in Athenian foreign policy well into the fifth century.

Although not nearly as extensive as Sparta, Attica was an unusually large area for one Greek city-state to control. Its 2,500 square kilometres were made up of three plains, divided by mountain ranges. These were shut off from the rest of Greece by the sea and, in the north-west, by the mountains of Cithaeron and Parnes, but unity was never achieved easily. There had been struggles between Athens and Eleusis, the largest town of the western plain, at some point in the past, and it may not have been until the early seventh century that Athens emerged as the dominant city in Attica. Even then Athens was comparatively undeveloped as a city. Although she had been one of the leading centres of Greece in the age of Geometric vase painting (see p. 131 above), by 750 she had been eclipsed as an overseas trader by emerging city-states such as Corinth and Sparta. The city faced strong competition from Argos, with its fine position on the eastern seaboard of the Peloponnese, and Aegina, an island visible from the Attic coast, which had become an important trading and naval power. Aegina was able to dominate the Saronic Gulf between the island and the Attic coast and proved a serious rival to Athens as late as the fifth century.

In compensation the people of Attica looked inwards. By the sixth century there are signs of dramatic increases of population in the countryside. Attica was not particularly rich (Plato talked of 'the skeleton of a body wasted by disease; the rich soft soil has all run away leaving the land nothing but skin and bone'), but there was variety—timber (for shipbuilding as well as charcoal), grazing land, and the more fertile soil of the plains. Studies of land use in the sixth century show that the upland townships were particularly prosperous. One major centre, the largest settlement in Attica after Athens, was Acharnai, which exploited the local woodland for charcoal, the only fuel suitable for cooking and heating in the city. The wealth of Acharnai was such that she provided many of Athens's hoplites. On the lowlands the most successful crop was the olive, which by the early sixth century produced a surplus that Athens was able to spare for export. Attica also had good clay, used to make her fine pottery. Two assets still to be exploited at this date were her marble, the finest coming from the slopes of Mount Pentelicus, and, most important of all, the rich silver mines of Laurium, only mined successfully from the late sixth century (although they had been exploited in a modest way as early as Mycenaean times, see earlier p. 122). The Athenian economy was thus a complex one, and it operated at several different levels, with farmers and craftsmen producing for their own needs, for those of her neighbours, and, increasingly, as it became more sophisticated, for overseas markets.

The legendary founding king of Athens was the hero Theseus. He was credited, like many heroes, with a range of great feats but he was also a cunning and resourceful operator. For the Athenians his most heroic achievement was to rid the city of the imposition of sending fourteen young men in tribute to king Minos of Crete where they were offered as sacrifice to the Minotaur, the half-man, half-bull that lurked in the cellars of Knossos. Theseus killed it and the scene is often found on coins and vases, a truly identifying moment of Athenian independence. Back in Athens, Theseus established himself in a palace on the Acropolis and insisted that all the surrounding villages of the Attic plain subjugate their assemblies and magistrates to a single assembly meeting in Athens. There is no archaeological or other literary evidence to support this move, let alone even the existence of Theseus, but later Theseus was honoured as the founding father of Athenian democracy.

In truth, in the eighth and seventh centuries Athens remained a state controlled by the aristocracy. Some sixty different aristocratic clans are known by name and noble birth counted as much as landed wealth. Between them the clans selected the three ruling magistrates (the archons), who after their one-year term of office joined a council that took overall responsibility for affairs of state. It was known as the Council of Areopagus, after the hill on which it met in Athens. As each clan had its own territorial base, conflict between them was probably inevitable as attempts to create a more stable government took place. In about 632 one aristocrat, Cylon, tried to seize power with the help of the neighbouring city of Megara (whose tyrant, Theagenes, was his father-in-law). He challenged the integrity of the *polis* by taking over the Acropolis itself but failed to win any wider support from the citizen community and his supporters were massacred at the instigation of a rival clan, the Alcmaeonids, despite a promise that they would be spared. The Alcmaeonids were expelled from Attica for this insult to the gods, and the bodies of their ancestors were dug up and thrown over the state boundaries. A curse remained attached to the clan.

So the aristocracy could never offer a stable government on the model, for instance, of the Bacchiadae in Corinth and, rather later than many other cities of Greece, the class was threatened by new economic and social pressures. The authors who describe these pressures, Aristotle and Plutarch, were both writing very much later and a great deal about them remains obscure. At one level they appear to reflect conflict between the citizen community in Athens, which was most open to outside influences, and the more isolated countryside. There were other pressures building up over land use. The Athenians followed the Greek custom of splitting inheritances among sons so that land was continually subdivided and the smaller landowners marginalized. These appear to have been bound in some kind of feudal relationship with the aristocracy. It involved surrendering a part of their produce, possibly a sixth, perhaps even five-sixths, of the total annually. This may have been a traditional payment offered in return for protection. It was clearly deeply resented. Even worse off were those who fell into debt. This was attached to their person so that they could end up as slaves and then could be sold abroad by their creditors. Athenian society was locking itself into a framework that excluded the majority

from free personal or economic enterprise and so stifled any chance of political development.

The Athenian crisis was, thus, a serious one involving tensions on a variety of levels, between different aristocratic factions and between the aristocracy and a mass of poorer landowners. One clumsy attempt to deal with the tensions came in 621 when one Draco was commissioned to draw up a law code. The tradition is that this was particularly harsh (hence the term 'draconian'), and biased in the interests of the aristocracy. There is some truth in this. Minor thefts could be punished by death and a debtor could become the personal possession of his creditor. However, it was a step forward that the code was published (making it harder for aristocratic judges to manipulate it in their favour). Moreover Draco's statutes distinguished between various forms of killings, between those done wilfully and those that were accidental—in other words, accepting the necessity to prove fault. The traditional custom had been that a killer had to bear responsibility for killings of any sort. Now a committee of fifty-one grandees judged each case and acquitted those who had caused a death without any intention to do so. If the killing had been intentional the offended clan could seek revenge. The pause while the issue was resolved seems to have helped avoid a tit-for-tat bloodbath that had been a common feature of previous aristocratic infighting.

The Reforms of Solon

Soon after 600, however, it became clear that Draco's laws had not resolved the underlying tensions of Athenian society. Urgent action had to be taken to avoid civil war. In 594, by a process that is not recorded, the city appointed one Solon to be archon (magistrate) with full powers to reform the state and its laws. Later sources claimed that Solon was of high birth but of moderate wealth. He is supposed to have been busy in trade, travelled widely, even to Egypt, and to have gained his reputation by encouraging the Athenians to seize the offshore island of Salamis from their neighbour, the city of Megara.

Solon left a lively if fragmentary account of his experiences in poetry. Today this would seem a rather esoteric way of writing one's memoirs, but in the early sixth century poetry was the only literary form (prose writing only began slightly later in Ionia) and it was an entirely appropriate way for a statesman to record his exploits. The 300 lines that remain confirm the portrait of a man with a broad vision and fully developed sense of humanity. He records his view that the roots of Athens's problems lay in the greediness of the rich, and he tells of public meetings at which he was urged to become a tyrant in order to overthrow aristocratic privilege. However, he claims he had the vision and integrity to refuse and always acted constitutionally. It was not an easy path to take. It was inevitable that any programme of reform that had a reasonable chance of bringing stability was likely to raise resentments among the powerful and frustrate the hopes of the poor, and Solon later described his experience of office as akin to that of a wolf set upon by a pack of hounds.

Solon was in fact a superb political operator, a true statesman, perhaps the first in the history of the west. He seems to have been inspired by the cunning and ingenuity of Homer's Odysseus. Despite a voiced commitment to the poor, once in power he shifted his ground to portray himself as a mediator between the two sides, holding, as he put it, a strong shield over them so that the honour of neither was slighted. The rich were slated for their greed. 'To destroy a great city by their thoughtlessness is the wish of those citizens won over by riches.' Crucially he sensed the importance of taking an abstract principle, *dike*, 'justice' or 'righteousness', to guide him. He argued that *dike* was something achievable by human beings. The final objective is *eunomia*, 'good order'.

Eunomia makes all things well ordered and fitted
and often puts chains on the unjust;
she smooths the rough, puts an end to excess, blinds insolence,
withers the flowers of unrighteousness;
straightens crooked judgements and softens deeds of arrogance,
puts an end to works of faction
and to the anger of painful strife; under her
all men's actions are fitting and wise.

(Translation: Oswyn Murray)

This is the moment perhaps more than any other when politics, the belief that human beings could consciously hammer out their own way of living together according to external values, was born. Solon stressed that human behaviour had consequences, good or ill, for the community but that one could provide a setting in which excesses were controlled and new energies released.

Solon first set himself the task of destroying the privileged position of the aristocracy. All forms of debt ownership were abolished, and Solon even claims that he searched overseas for Athenians who had been sold abroad. The payment of a part of any produce also ended, and Solon rejoices over the tearing up of the stones that marked the land subject to the dues. While inequalities of wealth remained no Athenian citizen was subject to another. Next followed the opening up of government to a wider class of citizens. Here again Solon's steadiness and good sense prevailed. He sensed that too radical a reform would lead either to chaos or to an aristocratic reaction. His response was to divide the citizen body into four classes on the basis of wealth. The richest class, the *pentakosiomedimnoi*, was made up of those with land that yielded 500 or more measures of grain, oil, or wine. It extended beyond the old aristocratic class. Below it the *hippeis* was made up of men with 300 measures of yield. The name suggests that they were seen as capable of raising their own horses for war. The next class, the *zeugitai*, with 200 measures or more, corresponded to those with enough wealth to equip themselves as hoplites. The lowest class, the *thetes*, were those with access to little or no land and so could not afford the weapons and armour to serve as hoplites.

By now the city appointed nine archons, or magistrates, annually. Forty candidates from the *pentakosiomedimnoi* were elected by tribal groups and the nine

were chosen from these by lot. The breadth of the *pentakosionmedimnoi* class and the introduction of selection by lot probably ensured that the aristocracy defined by nobility of birth was swamped in numbers by the new rich. Lesser offices were open to the next two classes, but the *thetes* were excluded from office. They had to wait another hundred years, when the desperate need to use them as rowers in the expanding Athenian navy finally earned them a full place in democratic government.

The *thetes* did, however, in their capacity as citizens, have a role to play, as members of the Assembly. This body was the traditional one found in most aristocratic communities, with the power to express its feelings for and against any major proposal. It may have had, or been given by Solon, the power to listen to appeals for justice by aggrieved citizens either against convictions or the acts of magistrates and so set the precedent for the trials by jury that were such an important feature of life in classical Athens. A Council of 400 citizens was set up by Solon to oversee its business. Later the Council and the Assembly were to be the central institutions of Athenian democracy, but this was never part of Solon's plan. Full democracy was inconceivable at this time. The Council's role may have been designed as a moderating one, to make sure that powerful popular forces expressed through the Assembly did not threaten the stability of the state. The *demos*, the 'people', were given 'as much privilege as they needed', as Solon put it diplomatically. The Areopagus retained its role as the guardian of the laws, the supervisor of the archons, and with general control of the state's affairs. Aristocratic influence, even though tempered by the admission of the new rich to political power, remained strong but the aristocracy grudgingly accepted the diminution of their power. A possible symbol of protest was the placing of *kouroi* on aristocratic graves, a practice that began about this time (see further below, p. 189).

As important as his other reforms was Solon's new law code. It was inscribed for all to see on wooden tablets set in rotating frames that were still intact 300 years later. In a semi-literate community, this was in itself an important move, as it gave public space to law within the city. This, not the whim of individuals, was to be the new reference point and Solon stressed that the law was equal for all, good and bad. Cleverly he linked his reforms to the cult of Athena, the patroness of the city. She would protect those who put the community first but the laws must be made by the community not by the gods. Almost every aspect of human conduct, from murder, prostitution, and vagrancy to the correct marking of boundaries between neighbours, is dealt with in the code. Interestingly, economic policy is also covered. The export of grain, for instance, is forbidden, no doubt in an attempt to stop greedy landowners selling such a precious commodity to Athens's neighbours at the expense of the poorer citizens. Athenian citizenship is offered to those with a craft skill who come to live permanently with their families in the city.

After Solon left office (probably by 590), legend says he went abroad for at least ten years, uncertain that his reforms would survive. It was certainly not obvious that he would have a lasting legacy. His insistence on the primacy of the law was, after all, a direct challenge to the concept of tyranny where an individual acted

above the law. Yet Solon had shown that an abstract principle instituted by human beings could bring harmony. It was a remarkable achievement to be able to conceptualize a 'just' community and find a measured way of achieving it. This is the birth-place of the liberal tradition.

At first, however, it appeared he was right to be uncertain. Athenian politics entered a confused period of struggles between different aristocratic factions. In some years conflict was so intense that no archons could be appointed. (The word *anarchia*, hence the English 'anarchy', was used to describe the result.) The factions were based on local allegiances and are recorded as parties of 'the Plain' or 'the Coast'. It was into this debilitating struggle that a tyrant, Peisistratus, forced his way. His rise to power was a chequered one. Over fifteen years after 560 he alternated between control of the city and exile. It was only in 546 that he was secure, living to hand on the tyranny to his sons, Hippias and Hipparchus, in 528.

The Peisistratid Tyranny

Although many of the details are lost, Peisistratus' struggle to win power illustrates some of the factors behind the emergence of tyranny. He first appears as a military leader, winner of a successful campaign against Megara. It was this campaign that led eventually to the confirmation of the strategically important island of Salamis as an Athenian possession. Another success was the recapture of Sigeum, a colony on the Hellespont, the entry to the Dardanelles, which established Athenian influence over that important trade route. Peisistratus then set about consolidating his support in more concrete ways. He was associated by later Greek historians with a faction which was either 'of the Hills' or 'beyond the Hills', and it has been suggested that this referred to the poor in general, the 'Hills' supporting less favoured land-owners than the plains and coast. (On the other hand, 'the Hills' may simply have been his territorial base.) He was also something of a showman, allegedly daring to ride into the Agora on one occasion with a local girl purporting to be Athena by his side. Outside Athens he had friends among other tyrants, such as Lygdamis of Naxos, and with cities such as Thebes. One period of exile was spent in Macedonia, where he seems to have amassed enough wealth to employ mercenaries. When he arrived back after his second period of exile, he had the men and enough support from Athenians themselves to be able to crush his aristocratic rivals. Charisma from military victory, alignment with the poor, and, in the final resort, determination and lack of inhibition about using brute force, all played their part in bringing him to power.

The Peisistratid tyranny is poorly recorded, but what details survive show that Peisistratus was a shrewd, and even benign, ruler. He seems to have exercised control over appointments, but the fragmentary archon lists that survive show that aristocratic families were not excluded from power. Culturally the city remained aristocratic, with the fine Athenian pottery of the period decorated in their favoured themes of myth and heroism. However, there was no attempt to tamper with Solon's

reforms, and Peisistratus fostered trade and craftsmanship. The Corinthian dominance in the Mediterranean pottery trade was now eclipsed by Athens, with the finest of the Athenian pots found not in Athens but in Etruscan Italy where they were exported to fill the tombs of the dead. Athens's own coins appear for the first time about the middle of the sixth century. At first their silver comes from Thrace, close to Peisistratus' base in exile. Soon Athens's own silver from the mines at Laurium was the main source, and this silver in effect funded the city's increasing need for imported corn. By the end of the century the coinage is graced with the head of Athena on one side and an owl, a bird sacred to the goddess, on the other. The design was to last for 300 years.

The prosperity of Athens gave the Peisistratids the chance to transform the city. It was natural that they should want to enhance the dominance of Athens over the surrounding countryside, where their rivals had their territorial bases, but their ambitions went further. They set about establishing Athens as a major religious centre. It may have been before or during his first period of office that Peisistratus initiated the Greater Panathenaea (though there are other possible founders). There had long been an annual festival to Athena, but now every four years there was an especially grand display with processions, and, in imitation of the new games springing up throughout Greece in the sixth century, competitions for amphorae filled with Attic oil. Later, one of the contests was for recitations from Homer. It seems as if an attempt was made to appropriate the poet for the city so as to emphasize its cultural superiority over the rest of the Greek world.

It was also under Peisistratus that the Acropolis was transformed into a treasure house of art. Paradoxically, much of what is known about the transformation is the result of the Persians' destruction of the site in 480 BC. The Athenians brought together the shattered sculpture and buried it in pits on the Acropolis, while columns of broken temples were reused in defensive walls or in the foundations of their successors, leaving a mass of carved stone for scholars to study. Even so, the sequence of building during the sixth century has proved difficult to reconstruct. There appears to have been a temple to Athena constructed about 560, possibly by Peisistratus in his first period of rule, then another on the same site, begun in 520. In between the sacred sites stood a number of *korai*, statues of girls offered as private dedications to the goddess Athena. (See Jeffrey Hurwit, *The Athenian Acropolis: History, Mythology, and Archaeology from the Neolithic Era to the Present*, Cambridge and New York, 1999, especially chapter 6 for this period.) The largest construction of all, probably started by Peisistratus' sons, was a massive temple to Zeus, Athena's father, on a ridge south-east of the Acropolis itself, although it remained unfinished for another 600 years.

Archaeologists trying to piece together the building programmes of the late sixth century in other parts of the city have found it difficult to distinguish between the achievements of Peisistratus and those of his sons. Hippias and Hipparchus are credited with the building of a temple to the Twelve Gods (whose foundations survive in the Agora and from where all distances in Attica were measured), and a fine nine-spouted fountain (as yet unrecovered). Another fountain from the same date

has been found in the south-east corner of the Agora. Fountains of clear water, replacing the stagnant and often contaminated water of wells, and drains, made of baked clay with heavy collared joints, mark the emergence of a more sophisticated city life, and similar developments have been found in other cities.

By this time, however, the tyranny seems to have lost its vigour. As had happened in Corinth, a second generation of tyrants could not sustain the popularity of the first. There was defeat abroad when Sigeum was lost to Persia. In 514 Hipparchus was assassinated, ironically while he was acting as a marshal at the Panathenaea. (It appears that his advances to a young man, Harmodius, had been rejected, and he had retaliated by refusing to allow Harmodius' sister to participate in the festival. This slight was enough to justify his death at the hands of Harmodius and his lover, one Aristogeiton. Aristotle later wrote that it was in their sexual desires that the tyrants most usually showed their lack of restraint and that this was the most common reason for their fall.) Hippias began to act more harshly, executing his opponents. In 510 the help of Spartan hoplites was called upon to finally overthrow the tyranny. Hippias left for exile, taking up residence in Sigeum, which was still under Persian control. There is no evidence of any major uprising, but the events of 514 to 510 were later celebrated as a liberation of the city. A great statue, lost but re-created in the 470s, of Harmodius and Aristogeiton survives in a Roman copy (now in the Archaeological Museum in Naples), and is a fine example of the heroic in classical art, the nudity of the two men emphasizing their heroism.

The Reforms of Cleisthenes

The Peisistratids had preserved some sense of Athens as a community and enhanced the prestige of the city itself with its magnificent central rock. They had controlled the aristocracy, but not destroyed it. In the countryside its network of support lay in the phratries. Although much about the nature of the phratries is disputed, they appear to have been associations of adjoining landowners, usually members or supporters of one aristocratic clan. Membership of a phratry provided the only proof of citizenship, so it was a closely guarded privilege. When the tyranny was overthrown, there appears to have been an immediate aristocratic reaction, partly sustained by nobles returning from exile, in which the phratries were purged of any members considered sympathetic to the tyrants. They lost their citizenship, and the state appeared once again to be falling under aristocratic control with all the rivalries that entailed. The leader of the aristocrats was one Isagoras who had a plan to restore traditional control through punishing the supporters of the tyrants and disenfranchising those who had recently emigrated to Attica.

Isagoras soon faced a challenge from Cleisthenes, a member of the Alcmaeonid clan (and a grandson of the Cleisthenes of Corinth). Cleisthenes had spent the last years of the tyranny in exile, returning to the city with the Spartans in 510. With the ancient curse still on his family, he had little support from among the traditional aristocracy, but he was clearly an ambitious man, a good speaker, and he began to

mobilize the citizenry in his support. Isagoras called on the Spartan king, Cleomenes, to help him. Cleomenes arrived, in 508, Cleisthenes and his supporters were exiled, and the invaders tried to engineer a coup in which power would be handed to 300 of Isagoras' supporters. The Athenians were outraged. They stood firm and drove Cleomenes and Isagoras up onto the Acropolis where they were soon forced into surrender. It was a genuine popular revolution but it could never have been transformed into a stable government without the genius of Cleisthenes who returned in triumph with a plan to break the political power of the *phratries* and establish genuine equality among citizens. He had an intuitive grasp of how to mould the intense patriotism of the Athenians into a new system that would enshrine democratic power at the core of the constitution while reasserting the power of the *Alcmaeonides*.

What is impressive about Cleisthenes' reforms is their radical nature. He knew that the danger lay in allowing the countryside to reassert their conservatism against the more radical city population that had been so enraged by the Spartan invasion. He moved fast, over the year 508–507. He appears to have simply bypassed the *phratry* system, creating a completely new set of political units, the *demes*, some 140 of them, probably based on local descent groups. (There was also some correlation with the place of residence when the *demes* were first established—the word *deme* is often translated as village. However, when a member of a *deme* moved, he did not lose his membership of that *deme* no matter where he later took up residence.) *Demes* were given responsibility for local order and thus their members were involved directly in administration. They drew up the citizen lists, enrolling young men at the age of 18. To break down regional power groups, Cleisthenes then divided Attica itself into three areas: the city itself, the coastal region, and the interior. Each area had its *demes* grouped into larger units known as *trittyes*. The culmination of the process was to take one *trittys* from each region and form the three into one tribe, making ten tribes in all for the whole of Attica. These ten tribes replaced four traditional Ionian tribes. The ten tribes selected (annually, by lot) fifty members each to sit on the council of 400 founded by Solon, which was thus enlarged to 500 members. The Council (also known as the *Boule*) kept its role as supervisor of the business of the Assembly. Its power grew inexorably as it could offer flexible responses to crises between meetings of the Assembly.

Through his new tribes Cleisthenes also produced the means by which a state army could be raised. Little is known of the sixth-century Athenian army, but, based as it was on the *phratries*, it must have preserved some elements of the aristocratic war-band. Now men had to train in their new tribes alongside men from other regions. A thousand hoplites and a few horsemen (land in Attica was not rich enough to sustain many horses) were required from each tribe. The city was their only common bond and morale was vastly improved. Herodotus notes how the energies of a free people were unleashed in a way unknown under the Peisistratid tyranny. 'As soon as they got their freedom, each man was eager to do the best he could for himself.' Settlers were moved out onto Salamis and Euboea in a precedent for the much more extensive empire of the later fifth century. From 501, in a reform that was not Cleisthenes', each tribe had to provide a general, *strategos*, elected by

the Assembly from those candidates who put themselves forward. The generals, who, unlike other state officials, could hold their appointment from one year to the next if re-elected, became the most prestigious figures in the city, gradually coming to overshadow the archons. Their growing status emphasizes, in fact, the relative lack of power enjoyed by the other magistrates in Athens (the contrast can be made with the enduring influence over the citizenry of Sparta by the kings and ephors). This is one reason why the Assembly and the Council were able to consolidate their own power.

There are many gaps in the evidence that survives for Cleisthenes' reforms, and it may be that the accounts shape them so that they appear to be a stepping-stone for the democratic revolution of 461 (see p. 251). It can be argued, however, that Cleisthenes was that rare figure in political history, the reformer with a rational plan for a fairer society that was successfully implemented and sustained. Any less far-seeing populist reformer might well have stirred up the urban population against the country-based aristocracy. The result would almost certainly have been a civil war. By introducing democracy in the countryside, Cleisthenes gave citizens the opportunity to build up administrative experience locally and also ensured that the countryside would be fully integrated into the Athenian democracy. (Evidence from inscriptions shows that they took up the challenge with enthusiasm.)

The Assembly was the main beneficiary. The procedure for selecting its members, the citizens of the state, was now under democratic rather than aristocratic control. Even though confident aristocratic speakers continued to dominate debates they were unable to build up a supporting faction from the minority of their class. With the end of the influence of the phratries and the old tribal system, citizens were now able, through the Assembly and Council, to participate in city affairs as equals (although the archons were still selected from the richest class). The word *isonomia* was coined to describe the system of equal balance that now prevailed. Shared experiences in the armed forces must have strengthened the sense of shared brotherhood. The next development, although not one necessarily envisaged by Cleisthenes, was to proceed to full democracy, with decision-making concentrated in the Assembly. (See Chapter 16 for the process.) Yet it was Cleisthenes' reforms that were chosen in 1993 as the starting point from which to celebrate 2,500 years since the founding of democracy in Europe. (See the chapters on Solon and Cleisthenes in Paul Cartledge, *Ancient Greek Political Thought in Practice*, Cambridge and New York, 2009.)

When specialists began classifying the pottery of Greece, they labelled the material produced between 620 and 480 BC, the period between the Orientalizing and the Classical period, as Archaic (from the Greek *archaios*, old). The term has gradually been extended, first to describe the wider cultural developments of the period and then as one for the age as a whole. Conventionally, the Archaic age has been seen as a prelude to the Classical period, offering hints of what was to come, but this is a misleading way to write history. The achievements of this period had no inevitable outcome and deserve to be valued in their own right.

Although they continued to draw on influences from the east, the Archaic age was one in which the Greeks increasingly determined their own patterns of development. Perhaps the dominant feel of the period is the gradual coming of order and control. ‘The overriding and enduring impulse of Archaic art’, writes Jeffrey Hurwit, ‘was to formalise, to pattern, to remake nature in order to make it intelligible.’ This can be seen in the growing naturalism of statues and the increasing control over subject matter in vase painting, with the chaotic animal parades of the Corinthian vases replaced by ordered depictions of myths. On the Ionian coast there is an intellectual revolution, with the first systematic application of rational thought to the physical world. These changes run alongside those political developments described in Chapter 11. Solon and Cleisthenes, for instance, were both applying abstract principles of justice to the practical problems of human beings living in society, very much in the spirit of the cultural changes that will be described here.

The Earliest Coinage

The sixth century was one of increasing wealth in the Greek world as trading contacts multiplied and cities, particularly those on the Ionian coast and in Italy, became more settled and prosperous. Traditionally, the appearance of coinage has been taken as a symbol of this commercial expansion. As an easily carried and stored means of establishing value and facilitating exchange, coinage has proved a fundamental part of every economy to the present day, only under challenge from electronic forms of transfer of wealth since the last century. The advantages it gave over barter are obvious when the dealings of the Egyptian scribe Penanouqit (p. 84) are recalled. In order to sell his ox he had to take a

varied selection of goods in return. Every transaction that involved barter must have been cumbersome.

The historian Herodotus attributed the invention of coinage to Lydia, the wealthy state of western Anatolia that neighboured the Greek cities of the eastern Aegean, and archaeological evidence supports him. The sequence by which Lydian coins developed has been found preserved in the foundation deposit of the temple of Artemis at Ephesus, then under Lydian control. The deposit, from shortly after 600 BC, includes metal lumps of a standard size. With them are similar lumps stamped on one side and others stamped on both. It appears that the Lydian kings handed their mercenaries their payment once a year in a single lump of metal (electrum, an alloy of silver and gold that occurs naturally). Here are the forerunners of coins, thin circular pieces of metal of standard size stamped by the issuing state. When the first Greek coins appear (on the trading island of Aegina about 595 BC, in Athens about 575, and in Corinth shortly afterwards), they are already stamped on both sides, a clear indication that the Greeks adopted the practice only after it had been fully developed by the Lydians. Each community set its own standard size and its coins were fractions of this.

The earliest coins were largely used for state accounting, paying officials and mercenaries, and for expenditure on public buildings. Recipients could pay taxes, fines, or harbour dues in return. Yet the early adoption of coinage by the trading island of Aegina shows that the advantages for traders were soon grasped. After 550 coins began to be minted in silver. There were plentiful supplies in Greece and the metal was easier to standardize than electrum that fell out of use shortly afterwards. Aegina imported her silver, probably from the island of Siphnos. With the metal recognized for its value silver could be hoarded and a large number of hoards of Aegina's coins have been found in the homes of her trading partners in Asia Minor, Egypt and as far west as Selinunte in Sicily. Later, Athenian coins became more widely scattered than those of any other city and the persistence of city emblems on coins (those of Aegina are stamped with a turtle, those of Athens with an owl) shows that this is one more way that cities are flaunting their individual identity. One of the most fascinating finds is the appearance of coins of an agreed standard among the cities of Ionia. They share an identical punched image on the reverse but each city has its own symbol on the obverse face (the same combination is used in the euro today). Was this a political gesture—in face of increasing Persian pressure—or simply a way of enlarging the area in which the value of the coins would be accepted?

The transition to coinage was made easier because markets had already begun to regulate weights and measures and establish the relative values of goods, including metals. Some of Solon's laws in Athens deal with this, with officials supervising the market to ensure fair play. So coinage fitted quite naturally with this process. The weight and purity of each coin could be guaranteed by the stamp of the city or kingdom it came from, and an unblemished design on both signs confirmed that it had not been scraped down. Obviously this meant that it was easier to spend the coin in the area where it was issued; despite the hoards from Aegina most coinage

is found in or near the city of its origin in this period. It could be said that coinage offered no more than a convenient way of measuring the weight of precious metal and thus avoiding protracted and peace-threatening disputes (between traders from rival cities, for instance).

There is now more scholarly caution over arguing that coinage transformed trade; it was more a question of facilitating it. Yet the appearance of coinage marked an important transition. Gold and silver had traditionally been the preserves of the aristocracy, a prominent feature of gift exchange. Now the *polis* had appropriated the metals and the number of tiny silver coins that survive show how every citizen now had access to these resources. Moreover, the idea of a substance that could be seen to have a universal value, used in any kind of transactional context, reappears in philosophical thought. For the archaeologist, of course, excavated coins are enormously helpful in establishing dates and they are important markers of political change (see earlier, pp. 8, 14).

Temples and Sculpture: The Influence of Egypt

Even if coinage may not have played a major part in commercial expansion, there is no doubt that this was an age of growing prosperity. The more successful cities flaunted their wealth through their temples, now seen as the showcases of a proud *polis*. The earliest temples were simply structures within which to house a cult figure (wooden in the earliest examples) but as the sanctuaries became more elaborate the roof was extended outwards and then supported by columns. The earliest known *peristasis*, literally ‘that that stands around’, is a wooden one in the temple of Artemis at Ephesus at the end of the eighth century. It was this temple that the king of Lydia rebuilt a hundred years later, with a length of 115 metres.

This inaugurated a period of great religious buildings in the eastern Greek Mediterranean. Between 575 and 560 an extensive sanctuary to the goddess Hera was laid out on the island of Samos. It was entered by a monumental gateway, and, within, beside the altar (altars were always kept outside temples so that sacrifices would be accessible to a large audience and the mess and smoke kept in the open air), was a vast temple. It was 100 metres long and 50 metres wide, with a double colonnade, twenty-one columns along each side, eight at the front, and ten at the back. As was now typical of Greek temples, it had a deep porch, and this led into the *cella* where the cult statue of the god or goddess would stand. At Didyma on the coast of Asia Minor there was another temple, dedicated to Apollo, that was so ambitious in its planned rebuilding in the sixth century it was never finished. A processional way with sphinxes led to the nearby city of Miletus. The temple to Hera was rebuilt in even grander form by Polycrates, another of the achievements for which Herodotus applauds him. This set off competition with the Peisistratids in Athens who were energetically building their own temples on the Acropolis (see earlier, p. 180).

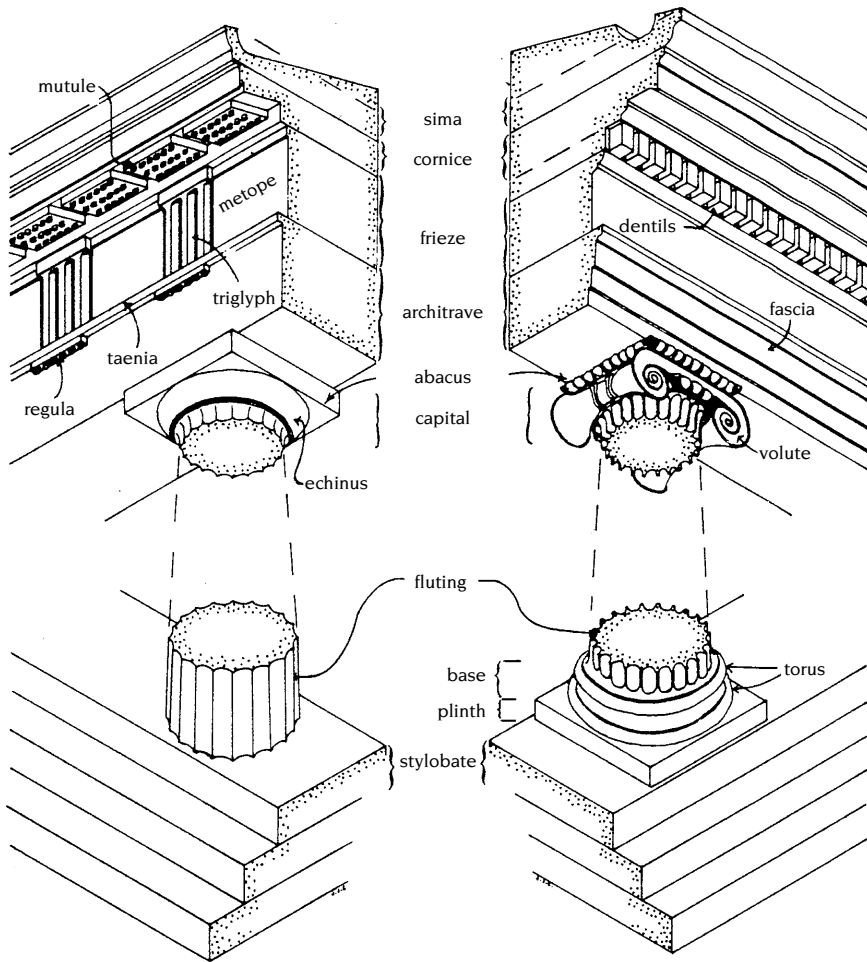


FIG. 2 The Doric and Ionic orders. This figure illustrates the essential differences between the two original classical orders.

These eastern temples carried the scrolled columns of the so-called Ionic order. The development of orders of architecture, particularly through the provision of a model that can be copied, is a typical Archaic achievement. The Ionic order appears to be a Greek invention, though the foliage and decoration that goes with the order still suggests the influence of the east. On the Greek mainland and in the west the Doric order was supreme. In this order the columns are topped by square stone slabs and the whole design is simpler. In the west the richer cities, determined to show off their new-found wealth, built their Doric temples in groups, often along ridges. There were four great sixth-century temples at Selinus in western Sicily, for instance, and two at Posidonia (Paestum) that are still in fine condition.

What were the influences on the development of these huge temples? The Greeks initiated their own tradition of building in stone. The Corinthians were carving limestone by the end of the eighth century, and there are Corinthian temples with limestone walls by the early seventh. The inspiration to be more creative and ambitious with the material possibly came from Egypt. The opening of Egypt by king Psammetichus I (Psamtek) (664–610 BC) encouraged the first major incursion of Greeks, both as traders and visitors, into his country. Inevitably they came into direct contact with its vast array of stone monuments. The pyramids of Giza, for instance, were only 120 kilometres from the Greek trading-post at Naucratis, and visitors would also have had the opportunity to see Psammetichus' own massive building programme in action. It is interesting that the majority of Greeks who settled Naucratis were Ionians, and a taste for monumental art seems to be found largely in the Ionian cities. The temple of Artemis at Ephesus with its double row of columns may be an echo of the columned halls of Egypt, while the famous row of marble lions at Delos seems an almost direct copy of the traditional sacred processional routes of the Egyptian temples and in its turn probably influenced the processional way at Didyma.

The Ionians may not have been the only Greeks who borrowed from the Egyptians. Much of the ornament in the Doric order seems to develop directly from earlier Greek timber models (the triglyphs, for instance, are reproductions in stone of the ends of roof-beams), but a comparison can be made between the columns of the shrine of Anubis at the temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri and the temples to Hera at Olympia (590 BC) and to Apollo at Corinth (540 BC). Some decorative mouldings on Doric temples, the cavetto, a hollowed moulding in the shape of a quarter-circle, also appear to be Egyptian in origin. The example may have spread to Greece via Corinthian traders.

Another Egyptian influence may be seen in sculpture. In the seventh century small terracotta and bronze statues, with wigged hair, a triangular face, and a flat skull, became common in Greece. They face forward in a rigid pose with both feet together. The style is called Daedalic, after a legendary Greek sculptor, Daedalus, although it originated, with so much else, from the east. By the second half of the seventh century, Greek sculptors begin making life-size Daedalic figures in marble. A famous one is the statue of Nikandre from Naxos, possibly carved as early as 650, another the 'Auxerre goddess' of 630, found in France but probably of Cretan origin. 'The origins of the Nikandre *kore*', writes Jeffrey Hurwit, 'are complex: she owes her shape to a native [Greek] tradition of large scale sculpture in wood, her style to a popular Orientalizing fashion, and her proportions to Egypt. It was probably also the Greek experience in Egypt that gave her sculptor the inspiration and confidence to transpose a large-scale wooden image into marble.'

Marble was to become the preferred material for the sculpture of the period (at least until bronze casting was perfected later in the century) and it also became popular as a building material for temples and other prominent buildings. It can be assumed that the Greeks learnt how to fashion marble after seeing Egyptians working on their native hard stones, granite and diorite. The source of much of this

marble was Naxos although the superb quality marble from the island of Paros soon became the most sought after. The most common sculptural form now became the *kouros*, a life-size (or even larger) nude male carved in marble, typically with the left leg in front of the right. These statues were planned out on stone blocks using a similar grid to the Egyptians, but the *kouroi* are normally nude (unlike the clothed Egyptian statues) and their poses are more relaxed and natural than those of their Egyptian counterparts, even though over 150 years, 650–500 BC, their form remains much the same.

The *kouroi* stood on sacred sites, often as grave-markers, but also as offerings to the gods. Richard Neer, in his *The Emergence of the Classical Style in Greek Sculpture* (Chicago, 2010), re-creates the sixth-century countryside around Anavysos on the Attic peninsula. Here a number of *kouroi* stood, marking graves and possibly the family landholding. These are aristocrats and proud of their achievements. One pedestal reads: 'Stay and mourn the marker of dead Kroisos whom raging Ares destroyed once on a day in the front ranks.' (Note the 'front ranks' so respected by Tyrtaeus.) Kroisos is a Lydian rather than a Greek name and so fits the dead warrior into that eastern aristocratic lifestyle described earlier (p. 160). This may have been the 'home' territory of the haughty clan of the Alcmaeonids. The *kouroi* are perfect in form and so the reality of a hacked about body retrieved from the battlefield has been transformed into an idealized human form by the act of heroism. Yet, as Neer goes on, fragments of fourteen large *kouroi* have also been found in the sanctuaries of Sounion on the tip of the peninsula and here they fill a different function, as votive offerings. Some *kouroi* show the attributes of the god Apollo, the symbol of order and reason—one cache of 120 *kouroi* has been uncovered at a sanctuary of Apollo in Boeotia.

The *kouroi* were found throughout mainland Greece (but rarely in the Peloponnese), on the Ionian islands, and even in Sicily. At the entrance to the sanctuary of Hera on Samos an enormous, three times life-size *kouros* stood, as if welcoming the victor to the sacred precinct. It was the personal offering of one Iches, son of Rhesis, made about 580. The link, here as elsewhere, is with aristocratic display. When an aristocratic elite is overthrown, the *kouroi* disappear. It could be said that the *kouros* is an immortalization of a hero at the height of his powers and probably the final flamboyant gesture of a threatened aristocratic elite. The *kouroi* offer the possibility of transcendence and it is telling that many centuries later the mauled bodies of Christian martyrs were also believed to have been transformed through their deaths into a state of physical and spiritual perfection.

The female form of the *kouros* is the *kore* (plural *korai*). The *korai* are also found as grave-markers but more usually as offerings in sanctuaries. One feature the *korai* share with the *kouroi* is a slight smile, the famous 'Archaic smile', which gives the impression of detaching them from everyday life. Here, like the *kouros*, they have achieved transcendence. They hold offerings, a flower, bird, or apple perhaps, and the clothes are often elaborate. The statues were originally coloured, the different hues highlighting the drapery. Why *korai* are offered as votives is not clear. The clothes of some echo those known to robe goddesses; others, it has been suggested,

are symbols of the controlled woman, her body frozen within her outer garments (see Andrew Stewart, *Art, Desire and the Body in Ancient Greece*, Cambridge, 1997). The fine collection of *korai* dedicated on the Acropolis in Athens between 510 and 480, for instance, were dedicated by men, possibly as marking an aristocratic ideal of womanhood they wished to honour. Some are named. A poignant example is Phrasikleia, a girl who had died before she had married, and was thus truly a maiden, *kore*, of about 550 BC, comes from a cemetery at Myrrhinous in eastern Attica and there are named *korai* from the sanctuary of Hera at Samos as well. The *korai* disappear after 480.

In the second half of the sixth century another skill was perfected, the art of large-scale bronze casting by the 'lost wax' method. The earliest surviving bronze sculpture, a *kouros* from the Piraeus, dates from about 525 (or slightly later) and marks the moment when the technical problems involved in casting and assembling bronze statues had been solved. The technique seems to have originated in Samos, an important centre of trade, from models imported from Egypt and the Near East and, like many innovations in the open world of the Aegean, spread quickly. The method involved building up a model in clay and covering it with a thin layer of wax. A further coating of clay was provided which was joined to the inner core by pins that ran through the wax. The whole was then heated, solidifying the clay and causing the wax to run out. The gap between the two layers of clay could then be filled with molten bronze. It was an important revolution in that solid bronze statues often cracked when they cooled and were, in any case, too heavy to transport easily. Bronze is tensile enough for arms to be uplifted and poses created that are impossible in marble. Even when things do go wrong, the bronze can be melted down again and a new core made for the casting. Shattered or blemished marble is impossible to reuse.

Soon the Greeks were producing bronzes of the highest quality and the ancient sources suggest there were thousands at the major Panhellenic sites and important cities such as Athens. The tiny number that have escaped being melted down (and often only discovered because they were hidden (the Delphi charioteer) or lost at sea and recovered) make it impossible to give an adequate survey. The Delphi charioteer, the Zeus from Artemisium, and the Riace warriors, looted possibly from a monument to celebrate the Athenian victory at Marathon at Delphi, are among the few that survive from the fifth century but they are truly magnificent in their quality. Bronze is more reflective than marble and the patina, often achieved after months of polishing, adds to their impact.

Among the most engaging buildings of the Archaic age are the city treasuries given by cities, as offerings or evidence of their reverence, to the great sanctuaries of the Greek world. They were simple buildings, normally no more than a marble rectangle faced by two columns. The best known are at Delphi, the site of the Pythian oracle, on the slopes of Mount Parnassus (see further p. 242). Here fragments of sculpture or walls survive from treasuries given by Sicyon (in the northern Peloponnese), Athens, and the island of Siphnos. The myths of the Greek world were portrayed on the sculptured friezes which run as narratives around these

treasuries. The finest, dating from about 530 BC, are from the Treasury of the Siphnians, wealthy from their gold and silver mines, who gave the Treasury as a thanksgiving for their good fortune. It is an exuberantly decorated building with marble from Siphnos itself but also from Naxos and Paros. The friezes are composed by two hands, one traditionally Ionian (the south and west friezes), the other influenced by local Attic styles and more innovative in style (north and east). On the east frieze there is a foreshortened chariot, an echo of the change in perspective being seen in Athenian pottery of the same date (see below). While the mythology of the friezes is often obscure, they appear to include a three-scene depiction of the judgement of Paris (Paris was asked to judge who was the most beautiful of the goddesses, Hera, Athena, or Aphrodite), a discussion by the gods of the fate of the defeated Trojans, and a battle between gods and giants (a Gigantomachy). The last was a favourite theme of the period, symbolizing the triumph of good over evil, Greek over barbarian.

The Revival of Athenian Pottery

The emergence of a new interest in myth can also be seen in the pottery of sixth-century Athens. In the seventh century, as has been seen, Corinthian pottery, with its riot of animal life, reigned supreme. The Athenian Geometric style had been completely displaced by it and in the early sixth century even the Athenian potters were adapting Corinthian styles, letting their animals run in disorder round the vases. By 570, however, the Athenians had resumed control of their pottery. On the François vase (exported to Italy and named after its finder) of this date, the painter Cleitias composed over 200 figures. There are some unrelated animals prancing around one band of the vase that echo the style absorbed from Corinth. However, most of the figures are related to each other and portray the myths surrounding the life of the hero Achilles, including the marriage of his parents, Peleus and Thetis, and the games held in honour of his dead companion Patroclus.

There are two simultaneous developments. First, the painter is imposing a unity of theme so that by the 530s, painters such as the superb Exechias are concentrating on a single event—a game of dice between the two heroes Ajax and Achilles, for instance, or the moment when the mast of the boat bearing the god Dionysus sprouts into a fruitful vine. Secondly, there is the preoccupation with myth. On these fine pots portrayals of daily life are rare. As with the sculptures of the treasuries, this is the world of the gods and heroes. Traditionally it has been believed that the pots themselves were used for the drinking parties of the aristocracies, the *symposia*, and they reflect the interests of this class. There are distinct types, the *amphora* for wine, the *hydria* for carrying in water, the *krater* for mixing the two. The guests would then sip from *kylices*, elegant drinking cups.

In about 525 there is another development. Instead of the figures on a vase being painted in black on an orange background, the process is reversed. Figures are now left in orange/red with the background being painted black. One painter, the so-called

Andokides Painter, who worked on pots from the workshop of the potter Andokides, used both black and red figures on the same pot but without changing the format in any way. Another painter in the same workshop, Psiax, went further. He grasped that while the details of black figures had to be engraved in the silhouette with a sharp tool, red figures could be drawn on and so the artistic possibilities enlarged. Psiax initiated a revolution in style. By the end of the sixth century, when red-figure painting was adopted by a group of Athenian potters known as the Pioneers, the new freedom given to painters was being exploited to the full. Not only are the details of each figure more exact, the figures themselves take on a new lease of life. They jump, tumble, and race across the whole surface of the pots and some are shown foreshortened. ‘The invention of the technique of showing foreshortened figures was,’ writes the art historian J. J. Pollitt, ‘both from a technical and conceptual point of view one of the most profound changes ever to have occurred in the history of art.’ The concern of the patrons of this pottery remains, however, largely the same—representations of myth or of scenes of aristocratic life. No one would have guessed from them that the Greek world was one that depended so totally on the labour of farmers.

The phrase ‘a new lease of life’ is suitable for explaining what happened next. In the last thirty years of their production, the *kouroi* gradually become more natural and relaxed in their pose. The temple sculptures become less wooden and exploit the spaces they are given—on the triangular pediments, for instance—more successfully. The sculptures of the great temple of Zeus at Olympia of about 460 BC (see p. 247 below) show a real understanding of the feelings and moods of the participants. This is the dawning of a new age, when, in the famous words of the fifth-century philosopher Protagoras, ‘man is the measure of all things.’ Although the nature of the relationship has been much argued over, it is often associated with the victory of Greece over the Persians and, in Athens, with the triumph of democracy. However, it could not have happened if there had not also been a revolution in intellectual thought, a revolution that saw the birth of western philosophy. (See also Interlude 3.)

The Birth of Western Philosophy

In 585, according to the historian Herodotus, a battle between the Medes and the Lydians had been brought to a sudden halt when the sky darkened with an eclipse of the sun. The combatants were so overawed that they made peace with each other. An equally remarkable fact, however, was that the eclipse was said to have been predicted by one Thales, a citizen of the Ionian city of Miletus. It is impossible to say now, from the fragmentary sources, whether Thales had genuinely predicted the eclipse or simply provided an explanation for it after it had happened. He may have been simply passing on material gathered by Babylonian astronomers, and his own picture of the cosmos, described below, would hardly have provided him with a means of prediction. However, the moment is often seen as the birth of Greek philosophy, with Thales, for Aristotle at least, its founding father. Arguably, of

course, a prediction of an eclipse is not normally seen as philosophy but the word here is used in the more general sense of a love of wisdom, and hence of enquiry, for its own sake. These thinkers were embedded in their own social and cultural world and many retained underpinning concepts of the divine which are now difficult to recover. Those before the great Socrates (active 430–390 BC) are known as the Presocratics. They were a varied bunch. Presocratic philosophy, writes Martin West, ‘was not a single vessel which a succession of pilots commanded and tried to steer towards an agreed destination, one tacking one way, the next altering course in the light of his own perceptions. It was more like a flotilla of small craft whose navigators did not all start from the same point or at the same time, nor all aim for the same goal; some went in groups, some were influenced by the movements of others, some travelled out of sight of each other.’

(See as introductions, Catherine Osborne, *Presocratic Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, 2004; A. A. Long (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy*, Cambridge and New York, 1999; and Robin Waterfield (ed.), *The First Philosophers: The Presocratics and Sophists*, Oxford and New York, 2009 (with translated texts).)

There is no one reason why Greek philosophy should have begun in the Ionian world. The cities of the Asian coast were the most prosperous of the sixth-century Greek world. Miletus was the richest of all and, like many of the others, had had a tyrant. After he had been overthrown a civil war had broken out. One of the factions in the war was known as ‘The Perpetual Sailors’, and this underlines the fact that many Milesians must have travelled abroad in search of trade—to Egypt, for instance, and equally to some of the opulent and sophisticated civilizations of the east. Hecataeus, author of the earliest known geography of the Mediterranean (c.500 BC), was from Miletus. So the Milesians would have had the opportunity to observe different cultures and absorb the varying intellectual traditions of these surrounding peoples. This in itself may have shaken conventional assumptions and liberated fresh ways of thinking.

The scholar who has done most to illuminate the birth of ‘fresh ways of thinking’ within the *polis* itself is Geoffrey Lloyd. For Lloyd the *polis* acts as a cockpit for debate. In the assemblies and the law courts argument was intense, yet there seem to have been restraints on letting these degenerate into outright civil war. In order to formulate and win arguments without a breakdown of order there was every incentive to find first principles from which debate could begin. So in an argument over whether an accused man could be condemned one could be forced back into a discussion of what is meant by ‘justice’, how evidence is to be tested, and what is an appropriate punishment. Those who ‘won’ such arguments could earn status as a result and so there was an increasing premium on the facility of reasoning that could be transferred into other ‘philosophical’ contexts. Lloyd shows how a word such as ‘witness’ used in the law courts is the root of the word for ‘evidence’ in scientific discourse and how the term used for cross-examination of witnesses was adopted to describe the testing of an idea or hypothesis. (See, in particular, Lloyd’s *Magic, Reason and Experience*, Cambridge, 1979.)

What is crucial to the development of reasoning is that ideas can be debated without fear of inciting the wrath of the gods. Greek philosophy was remarkable in that it paid little attention to authority figures. As Lloyd points out in his *The Revolutions of Wisdom* (Berkeley, 1987), while in Egypt and the Near East it was unheard of to criticize earlier work, in Greece it was the norm. If, however, earlier ‘authorities’ were to be challenged then coherent means of doing so had to be elaborated. This placed an emphasis on ways of finding truth and certainty (and, equally important, an assessment of what ‘truth’ and ‘certainty’ actually were in specific philosophical contexts).

The early philosophers were concerned with understanding the nature of the cosmos. The names of three from Miletus survive: Thales and two followers, Anaximander and Anaximenes. All were recorded as practical men. Thales had been involved in politics and had some engineering skills. He is said to have measured the heights of the pyramids and the size of the sun and the moon. (Yet, to the gentle ridicule of a watching maidservant, he sets off the tradition of the absent-minded professor by falling into a hole while he was absorbed in scanning the stars.) Anaximander made a map of the known world. Anaximenes was remembered for his skills in the observation of everyday things, such as how an oar broke through water and scattered phosphorescence. In short, they were public men, involved in politics and so performing on a public stage. Philosophy, in fact, was probably only a secondary interest for them, one way of ‘performing’. Aristotle may simply have highlighted the aspects of their thinking that he felt prefigured his own, to the exclusion of their other activities.

What survives of these early philosophers’ thought is very fragmentary and subject to continuing debate. They appear to have shared a belief that the world system, the *kosmos*, was subject to a divine force that gave it an underlying and orderly background. Where they got this idea, which is a far cry from the Homeric world of gods, is unknown—possibly from eastern mythology. It proved fundamental to the speculations that followed.

Thales is known for his prediction of the eclipse, but he also seems to have been the first man to look for the origins of the *kosmos*. For Thales the basis of all things was water, on which the earth itself floated. There were Egyptian and Semitic creation stories in which the initial state was a waste of waters, but Thales may also have picked water because of its demonstrable importance to all human life. What Thales appears to have been suggesting is that everything stems from this one originating source. It is not clear, however, whether Thales thought that all existing things could be broken down back into water or whether they had changed irreversibly into their new forms. This attempt to give a single, rational account of the natural order can be seen as a key moment in the evolution of western culture with implications which still excite scientists and philosophers today.

Anaximander concentrated on a problem which arose directly from Thales’ speculation, the difficulty of understanding how a particular physical entity (fire is an example given) can possibly come from something which seems to be an opposite to it, water. The very fact that he spotted the problem and tried to find a

reasoned solution to it is significant in itself. Anaximander's proposal lay in imagining an indeterminate and timeless substance from which everything developed. He called it 'the Boundless'. Anaximander saw 'the Boundless' not only as the origin of all material but with the separate function of surrounding the earth and keeping everything in balance. He seems to have believed that not only could water and fire never merge into each other but they, like other opposites such as 'the dry' and 'the wet', were actually in conflict with each other, with one or other dominant at any time with only an overriding force, 'the Boundless', to keep overall order. One might well see an analogy with political conflict in the *polis*, different factions in opposition to each other but with, ultimately, some overriding abstract ideal used to keep peace.

Anaximander's other contribution was to propose how the earth existed as a stable and unmoving object in space. Thales had argued that the earth rested on water, but this left the problem of what the water rested on. Anaximander proposed that there is no reason why anything that exists at the centre should necessarily move from that position. It cannot move in opposite directions at the same time and will thus always remain suspended in the centre. If this is Anaximander's argument (it is only recorded as such by Aristotle 200 years later), then it is the first instance in natural science of what is known as the principle of sufficient reason (the principle that for every fact there must be an explanation why the fact is as it is).

What Anaximander did not explain was the process by which one form of matter, 'the Boundless', became another. Was there a boundary between 'the Boundless' and the rest of the physical world or was 'the Boundless' in some form identical with the physical world? It was left to the third of the Milesian thinkers, Anaximenes, to suggest a solution. Anaximenes argued that the world consisted of one interchangeable matter, air, from which all physical objects derived. The air could become wind and then cloud or water vapour. The transition of steam into water and then into ice provided examples of further transitions. Harder substances, such as rock, consisted of air that had been condensed even further. For Anaximenes, air also had a spiritual quality. It was a substance that existed eternally whatever it might be temporarily transmuted into. Its special position could be seen from its importance in sustaining life, and here Anaximenes drew on a popular conception that death occurred because air had withdrawn from the human body.

If the universe did originate from one substance, the problem was how to reconcile this with the enormous diversity and sense of constant change that any observer of the physical world is confronted with. The question of diversity and disorder was posed by one of the most complex of the early philosophers, Heraclitus, who, like his forerunners, was an Ionian, from the city of Ephesus to the north of Miletus. Ephesus was culturally a Greek, Ionian, *polis*, nominally under Lydian and later Persian control, but still able to participate in the Greek world. Heraclitus was active about 500 BC and saw himself as the pioneer of a new approach to philosophy. The task that absorbed him was to reconcile the observable flux of the natural world with underlying stable principles that governed its existence.

Heraclitus' work survives in about a hundred fragments, as if he wrote not in continuous prose or verse as other philosophers did but in a series of short and penetrating observations. (The more recent example of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein comes to mind.) Many of the fragments are obscure and were seen as such by his contemporaries. They give the impression that Heraclitus was deliberately trying to disturb conventional views and show off his own brilliance. Certainly his contemporaries experienced him as an unsettling and unpopular figure. He explored the contradictions he perceived in the physical world. Salt water is drinkable for fish but undrinkable and deadly for men. Two very different properties exist in the same substance. The road that leads upwards also leads downwards. If one steps into a stream on successive days is it, with its changed water, still the same stream? In many cases, Heraclitus notes, a concept is intelligible only because there is an opposite to it. The concept of war is only meaningful if there is also one of peace or health if there is sickness. They are mutually dependent on each other, as also are night and day, winter and summer. Heraclitus gives a special place to Fire, which, at times in his words, seems to be the essential element that underlies others, even though it varies in intensity. He sees it as a transforming force that equates with gold as a means of achieving change (gold is transferable into bought goods) and as a universal system of value.

Fire appears to bring chaos but, as Heraclitus assures us, what appears to be diversity in nature is in fact part of a natural unity. Apparent conflict ultimately brings order so that, while opposites provide tensions, all are reconciled by a divine force, *logos*, that at time is equated with Fire itself. '*Logos* is day, night, winter, summer, war, peace, surfeit, famine.' 'All things come into being in accordance with *logos*.' Heraclitus was the first to give an elevated meaning to a term, *logos*, that originally meant no more than a written or spoken word. He also argued that, despite the impossibility of defining the true reality of *logos*, there were some who could approach its meaning more closely than others (naturally he was one of them!). On the highest level, it represented a divine law, common to all, that stood above everything else, just, as he says, the laws of a city are greater than its individuals. When *logos*, 'the Word', was appropriated by John in the opening of his Gospel, Greek philosophy achieved one of its greatest coups.

Heraclitus was happy to derive his ideas from the world he could observe around him. 'All that can be learnt by seeing and hearing, this I value highest,' as he put it in one fragment. The approach taken by his contemporary and philosophical rival Parmenides could not have been more different. Parmenides was born about 515 in Elea, a city in southern Italy that had been founded by exiles from another Ionian city, Phocaea. He may have been consciously challenging Heraclitus when he discarded observation about the physical world in favour of taking a lonely path towards finding truths based only on reason. The physical world, Parmenides argues, in the earliest piece of sustained philosophical argument to have survived, is made up only of what can be conceived in the mind. That and that alone exists. (This is fine for something that does exist, like a piece of rock, but is less helpful for concepts which can be imagined but which do not actually exist, such as a unicorn. It

is assumed that Parmenides did not intend to include them in his system.) What cannot be thought of has no existence whatsoever and nothing more can or need be said about it. Parmenides goes on from here to argue that what exists—a piece of rock, for instance—can only exist in that state. It cannot be conceived of in any pre- or post-rock state because then it would not have existed as it does now and what did not exist cannot be spoken of. Therefore the rock and by analogy all existing things are unchangeable, caught in a perpetual present. Parmenides goes further to argue that as ‘nothing’ cannot exist there cannot be empty space between objects—all things that exist are joined as one indivisible substance. The logical conclusion, therefore, is that the world is composed of one unchanging substance. This immediately contradicts what the senses have to say and opens up a chasm between the findings of reason and those of observation.

Parmenides’ pupil Zeno went on to explore the paradoxes exposed by Parmenides’ reasoning. One is that of the arrow in flight. To the senses the arrow appears to be moving. Yet logically, Zeno argued, it was not. The argument goes as follows. Everything is at rest when it is ‘at a place equal to itself’. At each moment of time the arrow is always at ‘a place equal to itself’. Therefore the arrow is always at rest. Equally a runner cannot run across a stadium until he has crossed half its length. He cannot reach half its length until he has covered a quarter and a quarter until he has covered an eighth and so on. Logically, he can never reach the end of the stadium.

Parmenides had shown that if a single incontrovertible starting point can be taken, then it is possible to proceed deductively to demonstrate some contingent truth. This was a crucial step in the development of philosophical argument. His conclusions were deeply unsettling in themselves and acted to stimulate further thought across the Greek world. Plato, for instance, acknowledged the influence of Parmenides when he argued that there are unchanging entities, the Forms, which can only be approached through reason (see p. 283).

One reaction to Parmenides was to enquire more closely into what it was that actually made up material objects. Empedocles, an extrovert aristocrat from Acragas in Sicily who combined personal austerity with a vanity so overweening that he suggested he might be divine, aimed to reinstate the senses as a valid source for knowledge. Objects, he suggested, were not unchanging as Parmenides had argued. They come into being in their different forms according to a different mix of four elements, earth, water, air, and fire. Trees, fish, birds, humans, even the gods, are composed of differing combinations of the elements. Forces of what he called Love and Strife caused the perpetual disintegration and reformation of different materials but the four elements remain constant. Empedocles went further. The continual mingling and remingling of the elements led at time to bizarre combinations but some survived in a form that could reproduce, although only through chance. Empedocles was ridiculed by Aristotle, who preferred an ordered process of evolution, but Empedocles was the one who eventually earned the accolade of Darwin for his insight. The question of whether there is an underlying order to evolution, represented by common features of different species such as eyes and feathers, continues to be debated.

An alternative explanation to the problem of material objects was to assume that they could be divided into tiny particles that were themselves indivisible. (The Greeks used the word *atomos* for such a particle, hence 'atom'.) The concept originated with the mid-fifth-century Leucippus, a native of Abdera, a small town in the northern Aegean founded by settlers from Ionia. Leucippus broke completely with Parmenides to assert that 'nothing' *could* exist (a good statement then as now from which to start a philosophical argument) in the sense that there could be empty space between things. If this was accepted, matter did not have to be joined together in one undifferentiated mass and objects could move as there was empty space to move through. Leucippus and his younger contemporary Democritus, also from Abdera, went on to argue that the physical world was made up of atoms that were of the same substance but differed in shape and size. These atoms move at random (exploiting the empty spaces), but atoms of like size or shape tend to be attracted to each other and form material objects (Democritus even postulated that some were conveniently provided with hooks). So the world as it exists takes shape. Every object is made of the same substance arranged differently according to the form of its constituent atoms. Atoms would move downwards but on occasions there would be a 'swerve', atoms would collide and new objects emerge. Where the Atomists differed from earlier cosmologists was in their belief that the 'swerves' were random. There is no mention of a guiding force behind them. The only things that exist are atoms and the empty spaces between them. This was the first developed statement of materialism, the theory that nothing exists beyond the material world that can be directly grasped by the senses. It made the Atomists Marx's favourite Greek philosophers (see further p. 426 on Lucretius).

A very different approach was provided by Pythagoras, another Ionian in origin, a native of the island of Samos. As noted above, Pythagoras was forced into exile in southern Italy, probably about 525 BC. Very little is known about his life, although a mass of later legend attaches to it. He was clearly a charismatic figure and drew around him a band of devoted followers who continued in existence long after his death and who inspired other similar groups in the cities of southern Italy. It has proved virtually impossible to distinguish between what Pythagoras himself taught and what was added later by the Pythagoreans. 'Pythagoras' theorem' of the right-angled triangle, for instance, seems to have had no direct connection with him (and was probably known, in essence, to the Babylonians many hundreds of years earlier).

The one teaching which is most likely to have been Pythagoras' own is that of the transmigration of the soul. Pythagoras appears to have believed that the soul exists as an immortal entity separately from the body. The body is simply its temporary home, and on the death of one body it moves on to another. What kind of body it moves on to depends on its behaviour in each life, for the soul is not only immortal, it is rational and responsible for its own actions. It must never let itself be conquered by the desires of the body. If it does then it will suffer in the next. Likewise, through correct behaviour it can move on to a happier existence. The Pythagoreans were therefore ascetics, but unlike many with this leaning they never cut themselves

off from the world. In fact, many Pythagoreans became deeply involved in politics, even though the austerity of their beliefs often aroused opposition. Although direct proof of any association of Pythagoras with mathematics is lacking, he is often linked with the theory that the structure of things rests on numbers. A single string spanning a sounding-box sounds a note when plucked. Halve the length of the string and pluck it again. The note is one octave higher. Metals mixed in certain proportions form new metals. The relationship between the parts of a 'perfect' human body can be calculated mathematically. Is it possible to argue from this that mathematical forms exist unseen behind all physical structures? The possibility that they do and can be grasped by a reasoning soul was to be taken up by Plato. The study of mathematics was to be the core of the education given to his aspiring philosophers. (See the excellent Kitty Ferguson, *Pythagoras*, London, 2010, for Pythagoras' legacy in the west.)

The varied arguments of the early Greek thinkers were invigorating but deeply unsettling. Faced with the seeming absurdities of Parmenides' deductions, philosophy could be dismissed as no more than an intellectual game. It could be argued that 'truth', if the concept could be said to exist at all, was something relative, dependent on the inadequate senses of individual observers or the ways in which they constructed their reasoned arguments. In the sixth century another Ionian, Xenophanes, had already made a similar point in a famous statement about the gods:

Immortal men imagine that gods are begotten and that they have human dress and speech and shape... If oxen or horses or lions had hands to draw with and to make works of art as men do, the horses would draw the forms of gods like horses, oxen like oxen, and they would make their gods' bodies similar to the bodily shape they themselves each had. (Translation: E. Hussey)

If the gods, to take Xenophanes' example, are the construction of human minds, it is a short step to argue that other concepts—goodness or justice, for instance—might also be. The fundamental question is then raised as to whether there could ever be any agreement over what the gods, or justice or goodness, might be. This was to be the central issue tackled by Socrates and Plato in the late fifth and early fourth centuries (see pp. 280–7).

The achievements of these early philosophers need to be placed in context. They had not invented rational thought, which is an intrinsic element of human society, found in every culture. The environment was being manipulated intelligently early in human history. In the *Odyssey* Odysseus fights his way through the waves after his shipwreck. He weighs up the alternative methods of getting safely to shore—going straight in and being smashed by rocks or swimming further along the shore and risking being swept off by a gust of wind. Faced with changing physical circumstances, human beings have always contemplated the alternatives for survival and made conscious decisions as to the best way forward.

The achievement of Greek philosophy was to go beyond these everyday decisions and recognize a distinct branch of reasoning that can be applied to abstract issues. The Egyptians and Babylonians had evolved a number of mathematical procedures to deal with the practical problems of building, calculating rations, and so on. These

procedures had reached their final form in Babylon about 1600 BC. What was missing was any ability to use numbers in an abstract way. This was the breakthrough achieved by the Greeks. Although a systematic outline of mathematical knowledge was not produced until Euclid's *Elements* in about 300 BC, it is clear that Greeks were thinking as pure mathematicians by the fifth century, able to work with axioms, definitions, proofs, and theorems. In this way, general principles could be formulated which could then be used to explore a wider range of other issues. It was the ability to work in the abstract that inspired intellectual progress, not just in mathematics but in science, metaphysics, ethics, even in politics. The reforms of Cleisthenes in Athens in the late sixth century (see p. 181) depended on a plan of bringing together a set of communities into the artificial structure of the *trittys*, a plan he must have constructed in an abstract form.

The end result, and one which was fundamental, was that there were few inhibitions on enquiry. The success of Greek philosophy lay in its critical and argumentative approach to an extraordinary range of questions. As the philosopher Bernard Williams pointed out:

In philosophy the Greeks initiated almost all its major fields—metaphysics, logic, the philosophy of language, the theory of knowledge, ethics, political philosophy and the philosophy of art. [Williams here is only referring to the concerns of modern philosophers—he might have added mathematics and science, included as ‘philosophy’ by the Greeks.] Not only did they start these areas of enquiry but they progressively distinguished what would still be recognised as many of the most basic questions in those areas.

It is worth noting that Williams concentrates on the Greeks as question *askers*. They did not always come up with very effective answers. There were good reasons for this. First, their speculations often ran far ahead of what their senses could cope with. It is sobering to realize that no Greek astronomer had any means of exploring the heavens other than his own eyes. (There were instruments developed for measuring angles, but they still depended on the naked eye for their use.) Aristotle's theory of spontaneous generation, the idea that life could come from nowhere, which lingered on as a misconception until the seventeenth century, arose largely because he had no way of seeing small objects. (His colleague Theophrastus, in a textbook example of how no Greek philosopher was immune from criticism by his colleagues, made the point by noting tiny seeds which Aristotle had missed, thus casting doubt on the concept of spontaneous generation altogether.) Not the least of the Greeks' philosophical achievements was, however, to recognize that even though the senses were inadequate they were still crucial. The fifth-century philosopher Democritus got to the core of the problem when he constructed a dialogue between a mind and the senses. ‘Wretched mind, taking your proofs from us (the senses), do you overthrow us? Our overthrow will be your fall.’

In short, the Greek world of the sixth century fostered an intellectual curiosity and creativity that took many forms. The Archaic age deserves to be seen as one where a particular attitude of mind took root, perhaps, as has been suggested,

because of the intensity of life in the *polis*. It involved the search for an understanding of the physical world free of the restraints imposed by those cultures that still lived in the shadow of threatening gods. It remained a fragmented world, however, one in which cities survived precariously on the limited resources available. Its vulnerability was now to be tested by attack from the east by the largest empire the world had yet seen, that of Persia.

These men having set a crown of imperishable glory on their own land were folded in the dark cloud of death; yet being dead they have not died, since from on high their excellence raises them gloriously out of the house of Hades.

(Simonides of Ceos, *On the Spartan Dead at the Battle of Plataea*, 479)

The Ionian cities had been prosperous and confident before they had been overrun by the Persians in the 540s. Their navies were the largest of the Greek world while their traders had penetrated Egypt and inland through Lydia to the east. These contacts with the east had stimulated important cultural achievements, among them epic poetry and the birth of philosophy. Politically, however, the cities were conservative, many of them living under tyrants. Their conqueror, the Persian Cyrus, had sustained and used the tyrants to maintain control of this new part of his empire, but many Ionians had fled west as refugees, enriching the cities of the Greek mainland and Italy with their skills.

The cities had their own rivalries. One was between Miletus and the strategically important Cycladic island of Naxos. The tyrant of Miletus, one Aristagoras, persuaded the Persians that Naxos might be used as a stepping-stone to further conquests in the Aegean. He must have hoped that he could gain Persian support for his own ambitions. His plotting failed partly because the Persian commander had warned Naxos of the attack. Furious at the betrayal Aristagoras turned against Persia. He exploited a growing Greek restiveness with tyrannical rule by surrendering his tyranny and proclaiming *isonomia*, 'equality before the law', for the citizens of Miletus.

The response from his fellow Greeks was immediate. There was a traditional camaraderie among the Ionian cities based on their common cultural roots and the everyday contact of traders. They had suffered together from the growing demands for tax and men from the Persians and had seen their long-established trading patterns disrupted by the Persian advance. (At Naucratis, the Greek trading-post in Egypt chiefly patronized by the Ionian Greeks, for instance, the sequence of Greek pottery, and hence, it is assumed, their occupation, breaks at 525 BC.) Now they too overturned their tyrannies and met to plan action against the Persians.

First, help was sought from the mainland. Sparta was preoccupied at the time with her rivalry with Argos, but Athens and the city of Eretria (on Euboea) honoured

their ancient links with the Ionians. In 498 twenty ships from Athens and five from Eretria crossed the Aegean to join the massed Ionian fleets. An expedition was launched inland to Sardis and the city was set on fire before the Persians were able to drive the Ionians off. This provocative raid sparked off other revolts among the cities of the Hellespont as well as those further south on the Asian coast. Even the Greek cities of Cyprus managed to throw off the Persian yoke for a year.

To counter-attack, the Persians divided their forces into three, but by 495 they had still not regained control. It was no easier, however, for the Greeks to win. While the historian Herodotus saw the major problem as being the cowardice and laziness of the Ionians, it was next to impossible to forge the hoplite forces of the scattered cities into a single force that would have been strong enough to crush the Persians. The revolt looked as if it had entered stalemate until, in 494, the Persians decided to launch an attack on Miletus, still the centre of the revolt. The Ionians massed their fleets to defend the city, but after defeating them by the island of Lade, just off the coast, the Persians managed to force their way through and take the city. With the core of resistance gone, other cities were then subdued one by one and the revolt was over.

After the initial brutality of revenge, Darius was shrewd enough to relax his grip on the Greek cities, and Herodotus suggests that democratic governments were free to emerge. However, the spirit of the Ionian world was broken and the prosperity its cities had known in the Archaic age was never recovered. The question now was whether Darius would move further into Greece. The opportunity was there. As a result of Darius' earlier expedition into Thrace (see p. 106), the Persians now controlled the north Aegean coast as far south as Mount Olympus. They could call on the navies of Egypt and the Phoenicians, and the Greeks themselves appeared fragmented by their internal quarrels. The Athenians and Eretrians had given Darius his justification. In fact, Herodotus suggests revenge may have been as powerful a motive as the desire for conquest. Darius sent messengers calling on the Greek cities to submit. In two cases, Sparta and Athens, the messengers were executed, an act of sacrilege which made war inevitable.

The expedition was entrusted to Datis, a Mede, and Darius' nephew Artaphrenes. As many as 300 triremes were gathered in Cilicia and then loaded with men and horses. The leaders may never have intended to attack a major city such as Athens but certainly the islands of the central Aegean were a target with the hope of progressing further westwards to the island of Euboea. The former tyrant of Athens, Hippias, now 80, was included in the fleet in case the opportunity arose to restore him to Athens. (For a readable narrative of the wars see Tom Holland, *Persian Fire: The First World Empire and the Battle for the West*, London and New York, 2005.)

In the early summer of 490 Datis began edging his way along the southern coast of Asia Minor. At first the Greeks were not alarmed. The obvious route for the invading forces was to head northwards along the coast towards Cyprus and then round to Thrace, where they would arrive only towards the end of the campaigning season. They were taken by surprise when the Persians struck directly west across the open Aegean. Naxos was attacked and this time subdued, as was the sacred



MAP 4



island of Delos, and the Persian fleet sailed on to Euboea, where the city of Eretria was besieged until it was betrayed and taken within a week.

It was now late summer. The Persians were in a formidable position. They were in good order (they had actually managed to co-opt extra troops on their way) and had a foothold on Greek territory with a supply route that ran back to the empire. Within a few days they had moved over to the mainland, landing unopposed on the long beach of Marathon, 40 kilometres north-east of Athens. Hippias had his own reasons for guiding the Persians there—it had been where he had landed with his father, Peisistratus, over fifty years before—but it was a good site in other ways. There was pasture and fresh water, and if a battle were to be fought there, there was ample room for the Persian cavalry, possibly as many as 1,000 strong, to manoeuvre.

Meanwhile, the Athenians learned by fire signal that the Persians had landed. A runner, Phidippides, was sent at once to Sparta for help and arrived ‘on the second day’. When he returned, having covered some 240 kilometres in under 48 hours, it was with the news that the completion of a religious ritual would hold up the Spartans for a week. By this time the Athenian army, of some 9,000 hoplites, joined by a thousand men from the city of Plataea, had marched north and were settled in opposite the Persian army. The Greeks were outnumbered two to one and faced an army with both cavalry and archers. There was hot dispute over whether to attack at once or to wait for further help. One of the ten generals, Miltiades, who had seen the Persians at war in Thrace, eventually hammered out an agreement that, if conditions proved especially favourable, attack must be made without delay.

The Persians’ hope must have been to use their archers and cavalry to break up the massed hoplite ranks of the Greeks and then send in their infantry once they were in disarray. The only chance for the Greeks was to meet the Persian infantry head on and trust that the superior coordination and morale of the hoplites would overwhelm them. Ideally a time should be chosen when the Persian cavalry was off the field and with the Greeks as close as possible to the Persians before they began their charge. Every day they edged their defended line forward. Then on 17 September 490 the Persian cavalry was out of sight. The horses may have been withdrawn for watering during the night and had delayed in returning, but it is possible that they were being assembled to head south to make a direct attack on Athens.

By coincidence, command for the day belonged to Miltiades and, once he had persuaded Callimachus, the war archon who had ultimate responsibility for the army, he was quick to seize the opportunity. He drew up the hoplites in a long line with the wings strengthened and ordered an immediate attack. The Greeks ran towards the Persians in the hope of reaching their lines before the Persian archers broke up the phalanx. The two sides crashed together, but while the Persians appeared to be gaining in the centre the Greeks enveloped them in the rear and broke them up. A massacre followed with some 6,400 Persians being killed as they fled towards the beach or the surrounding marshes. Only 192 Athenians died and they remain buried under a mound on the battlefield. The list of the twenty-two casualties from the Athenian tribe of Erechtheis, originally placed with those of the other nine tribes in front of the mound, has recently been found in the opulent

second-century AD villa of Herodes Atticus in the Peloponnese. (See further Peter Krentz, *The Battle of Marathon*, New Haven and London, 2010.)

The surviving Persians made a final attempt to sail round the coast to Athens, but as they appeared in sight of the city, they saw that the Greeks had already marched the 40 kilometres back and were ready to confront them. It had been a complete victory, acknowledged even by the Spartans, who arrived, as promised, a day later to cast an expert eye over the body-strewn battlefield. (The story that Phidippides ran on from Athens to take part in the battle and then ran back to Athens to tell of the victory seems, sadly, to be later invention, but it has proved a legend powerful enough to create the modern marathon, a run of 42 kilometres, the distance between Marathon and Athens. The first marathon was run at the revived Olympic Games in Athens in 1896 when, appropriately enough, a Greek, Spiros Louis, was the winner.)

It has been possible to describe the Persian invasion of 490 in such detail because the events formed part of the first 'modern' work of history, the *Histories* of Herodotus. Herodotus was born in the 480s at Halicarnassus (the modern Bodrum) on the coast of Asia Minor, one of the Greek cities incorporated into the Persian empire. His background shows what a fluid concept 'Greekness' had become by the fifth century. Technically Herodotus was a subject of the Persian empire, while the names of his father and uncle suggest an origin among the native peoples of the coast, the Carians, who had presumably intermarried with the Greeks. Yet culturally Herodotus was Greek and could speak no other language. (See J. A. S. Evans, *Herodotus, Explorer of the Past*, Princeton, 1991; John Gould, *Herodotus*, Bristol, 2002; and more generally, Nino Luraghi (ed.), *The Historian's Craft in the Age of Herodotus*, Oxford and New York, 2001. There is a fine new translation by Tom Holland.)

Very little is known of Herodotus' life. The seizure of power by a tyrant in Halicarnassus may have driven him from the city into exile on Samos. He seems to have returned to Halicarnassus about 464, possibly as part of a liberation force. It must have been shortly afterwards that his wanderings through the Greek and Persian world began. The *Histories* give the impression of being travel notes, with a special emphasis on the cultural differences of those he visited, that were later refashioned into a narrative of the wars. In his later years Herodotus visited most of the mainland cities of Greece and probably gave readings at Athens. However, his final home appears to have been the Athenian-led colony at Thurii in southern Italy, and it was probably here that he died in about 425 BC.

When he began to write up his *Histories*, probably in the 440s, Herodotus set himself, in his own words, the task of giving 'the great and wondrous achievements of both the Greek and non-Greek barbarians their due renown, especially assessing why they had fought each other'. It is the vivid nature of Herodotus' narrative that is compelling. Recently I stood under the heights of Sardis with a study group and read them Herodotus' account of how the Persians spotted a way up to the citadel before they took the city in 546 BC. It was a powerful experience to bring site and narrative together two and a half thousand years after the event. However, Herodotus was trying to understand *why* the wars had happened in the first place. He was also promising

an even-handed investigation. In the circumstances, the word he appropriated from earlier philosophers, *historia*, ‘enquiry’ or ‘research’, was an appropriate one. A range of new commentaries on *The Histories* (Oxford and Cambridge University Presses both have their editions under way) illustrate the variety of ways in which he proves himself a thoughtful and sophisticated writer, ‘the Homer of European prose’, as the classical scholar Richard Jebb (1841–1905) had put it much earlier.

Herodotus’ was a new departure in the study of the past. His achievement can be highlighted by looking at other contemporary traditions of presenting the past. For the Jews, whose national history was being written in this same period, the past was a record of the relationship between man and Yahweh. Political events were interpreted as the result of Israel’s willingness to obey or disobey the commands of Yahweh. For the Egyptian state, as has been seen (Chapters 3 and 4 *passim*), the past was in the possession of the king, and he would manipulate it to protect his own position. The record of past kings was doctored so that it became an unending succession of keepers of good order at the end of which a new ruler could take his place. Truth, in the sense of an impartial and objective account of the past, was therefore dispensable in the interests of political stability.

The Greeks used myth in similar if rather more fluid ways. Myths were not simply stories handed down from the past to be used for entertainment. They could be manipulated for overtly political ends. As has already been seen, the Greeks used the myths of Heracleian labours in Sicily as a justification for settling there. Similarly, foundation myths tied a people to their land and helped support their right to be there. Part of Herodotus’ achievement was to question the validity of myth. As Paul Cartledge has pointed out, there are at least three occasions in his *Histories* where he describes Greek myths only to reject them as insufficient bases for finding the truth. He even derides those who believe implausible tales as simple-minded. ‘Here, in other words’, says Cartledge, ‘is Herodotus the “scientific” historian, staking his claim to mastery of his new intellectual territory.’ If one looks at the careful way in which Herodotus assesses the possible causes for the annual Nile floods in his Book II, for instance, one finds him using reason and empirical evidence in his acceptance and rejections of specific explanations and openly deriding one solution as a myth dreamt up by poets. (See further Rosalind Thomas, *Herodotus in Context: Ethnography, Science and the Art of Persuasion*, Cambridge, 2000.) This does not mean that Herodotus disregards the power of religion. Throughout his *Histories* he relates how actions are shaped by the religious conventions of the participants, and he even seems prepared to accept that there are cases of divine intervention (at the Battle of Marathon, for instance, a legend survived of the Athenian founder-hero Theseus rushing ahead of the Athenian battle line).

There is also an underlying propaganda message in the *Histories*. One of their purposes was to applaud the victory of the Greeks against the overwhelming power of the Persians and draw appropriate conclusions about the differences between free and unfree states and the consequences of unrestricted pride. The Greeks, with their simple life, cooperative political arrangements, and belief in liberty, are, in Herodotus’ eyes, superior, and this explains their success.

Whatever the framework within which he worked, Herodotus makes a serious effort to look at both sides, to ask questions, and to try to establish the truth. He is prepared to value the customs of other people. While he writes for a Greek world, he has the vision to understand that the Greek way of life does not necessarily appear superior to others. (He has a good story in which Indian and Greek subjects of Darius tell the Persian king of their very different burial customs and both end up disgusted with the other's practices.) He also tries to avoid stereotypes. The Persian king Xerxes, for instance, emerges not as a one-dimensional ogre but as a human being with normal, if extravagant, ambitions. Among Herodotus' greatest assets are his intellectual breadth and curiosity.

It was this curiosity that took Herodotus so far in his researches. In his preliminary study of the Persian empire he tried to understand it as a whole, a task which took him among its varied conquests from Babylonia, Egypt, the Levantine coast, and the Black Sea. Egypt clearly fascinated him, as it did many a Greek traveller, and Book II of the *Histories* is devoted to the country. Despite their innumerable diversions into geography, folk tales, and entertaining anecdotes, in the last resort the *Histories* hold together as a great war story. In this sense they echo the epic tradition established by Homer and they range well beyond a narrative of events. Herodotus' successor Thucydides (see p. 297) narrowed the perspectives of history to political events, and it is perhaps only very recently, when total history has become the vogue, that Herodotus' achievement has been fully recognized. (See J. S. Marozzi, *The Man Who Invented History: Travels with Herodotus*, London, 2008.) Like Homer, Herodotus also creates a sense of a Greek identity that transcends any city loyalty. His definition of the Greeks in terms of their common blood, language, religion, and customs still provides a useful working model for understanding that identity. The contrasts he presents between Greeks and Persians help define it further.

The most majestic piece of Herodotus' narrative comes when he describes the second Persian invasion, of 480. Darius died in 486. A revolt in Egypt had prevented him from renewing his attacks on the Greeks. His son, Xerxes, succeeded comparatively easily but showed he was a much more intolerant man than his father, preferring to rule over his subject peoples in his own right, rather than sheltering, as Darius had done, behind the traditional local titles of pharaoh of Egypt or king of Babylon. Although he had little experience of war, Xerxes was determined to settle the troublesome business of the Greeks, and by 484 ambitious preparations for a much larger invasion were in hand.

Xerxes' task was to bring a large army, supported by a navy, across from Asia through Thrace (the European possessions of the empire had been unaffected by the defeat at Marathon) and then down into Greece. It was a logistical nightmare, but the Persian planning was thorough. A vulnerable area was the sea around Mount Athos, which was prone to storms, so a canal, wide enough to take two triremes abreast, was dug across the peninsula. It took two years to construct. The Hellespont running between Asia and Europe was another dangerous spot, exposed as it was to high winds and rough seas. Its breadth, at the crossing point between

Abydos and Sestos, of 2,500 metres was spanned by two pontoon bridges attached by cables to each shore. The first pair were swept away by a gale and in his fury Xerxes ordered the waters be whipped and fetters dropped into them as if he was enslaving them. The second bridge held and was covered by a wooden roadway designed so that crossing animals would not see the waters below. For Herodotus, as for Aeschylus in his play *The Persians* (first performed in 472), these preparations, especially the enslaving of the sea, were pure *hubris*, an act of overweening pride and so an affront to the gods bound to bring retaliatory punishment.

This time the Greeks could not depend on a lucky turn of events on the battlefield. The great army gathered by Xerxes from the ends of his empire may have numbered 200,000, ten times the size of that at Marathon, and the navy, with 600 triremes, may have been twice as large. (Herodotus gives a figure of 1,700,000 for the army and 1,300 triremes, but these may have been deliberate exaggerations to emphasize the magnitude of the task facing the Greeks.) A single city could not defeat them, and some unity had to be forged among the Greeks. It was not an easy task. The Greek cities had their own enmities—Athens for Aegina, Sparta for Argos—that made unity difficult. Many states in the north were simply overawed by the Persians and by 481 had already submitted to Xerxes' envoys. There were aristocratic factions in many cities who hoped a Persian victory might give them the opportunity to seize back power from citizen assemblies. The oracle at Delphi, whose presiding god Apollo had been given special favour by Darius, saw its best chance of survival as neutrality and its prophecies were coded accordingly. (Themistocles, the Athenian leader, had to create his own interpretation of the advice given by the oracle to Athens in order to persuade the Athenians it was favourable to them.)

It was Sparta who took the initiative in October 481 in calling the Greeks together to plan resistance. There were two urgent tasks: to coordinate resources under one central leader, and to warn off the many cities who looked like submitting to the Persians. Those who met at the Isthmus of Corinth, over thirty states in all, agreed to end their feuds and to make Sparta supreme commander of both land and sea forces. It was decreed that any city that submitted voluntarily to the Persians would have its property confiscated, with a tenth being offered to the oracle at Delphi. Even so, in the campaign that followed many failed to join in. Argos would never fight alongside Sparta; Corcyra promised ships but they never arrived. Syracuse, probably the richest city in the Greek world, offered an enormous army but only on the condition that her ruler, Gelon, would have chief command of the Greeks. The offer was turned down. In the event, Gelon played his part by heavily defeating a Carthaginian attack on Sicily made, possibly with Persian connivance, the following year.

It was magnanimous of Athens to submit to Spartan leadership (although there is also evidence that other states would not have accepted her own leadership). She had shown, at Marathon, that she had a highly competent army, and since 490 she had concentrated on building a large trireme fleet. The inspiration for this had come from Themistocles, a member of a poor but aristocratic family, the Lycomids,

who, since his first election as an archon in 493, had placed naval policy first. He had successfully fought for the creation of a harbour at the sheltered Piraeus to replace the open beach at Phaleron. (The Piraeus had only become an option when the island of Salamis, which overlooked its entrance, had become an Athenian possession in the sixth century.) When, in 482, a new rich strain of silver was discovered in the Laurium mines, Themistocles persuaded the Assembly to spend it on creating a new fleet rather than distributing it among the citizens as had been customary. To get his way he cleverly played on the traditional fears of the Athenians of Aegina, but it is certain that his real motive was the protection of the city against another Persian invasion. By 480 Athens was to have a fleet of 200 triremes.

The training had to be meticulous, as was shown when in the 1980s a trireme, the *Olympias*, was reconstructed. The crew were stacked in threes, one above another with the two lower rows concealed from sight. The problem of coordinating each vertical set of rowers and then each top rower with his fellows on the open deck proved formidable but not insurmountable. With 170 rowers on board in a trial of 1987 *Olympias* reached a speed of nine knots and was able to execute a 180 degree turn in under a minute. The trireme could not have been rowed successfully without a well-developed sense of teamwork.

By the time a second meeting of the resisting Greek cities could be held, at the Isthmus in the spring of 480, Xerxes was poised to cross into Europe. Herodotus describes his colourful army of Persians, Medes, Indians, Arabs, Ethiopians, Libyans, and Lydians, each with distinctive battledress and weapons. The core of the army were the 10,000 Persian Immortals, so-called, the Greeks believed, because if one died his place was immediately filled. The navy was similarly mixed, with the largest contingent being provided by the Phoenicians and Egyptians. There was a large number of supporting triremes conscripted from the Ionian cities. Greeks were about to find themselves fighting other Greeks.

The coordination of so many nationalities, many of whom must have been lukewarm in their loyalty to Persia, was bound to prove a challenge. Just as serious was the task of getting the army and navy intact into Greece before the end of the campaigning season. This was normally October, a month by which winter storms had become frequent and the best of the harvest had been eaten and so was not available for invading forces to plunder. It was clear that navy and army would have to travel along the coast together. The rowers could not land to pick up fresh water without Persian control of the coastline, while the army was not secure if Greeks could land by sea and threaten it from behind.

The first choice of the Greeks was to meet the Persians as far north as Thessaly with its open plains. There was much to be said for such a forward policy, not least because it would allow the Thessalian cavalry, the best on mainland Greece, to be used on the Greek side. A small Greek force was actually sent north, but there were at least three passes to defend and the armies could easily have been outflanked. No one could be sure that the Thessalian aristocracy could be relied on. It was finally agreed that the first attempt to check the Persian army would take place at the

pass of Thermopylae, which ran between the mountains and the sea east of the city of Trachis. In places the pass was only two metres wide and it seemed a reasonable holding place. Even here, however, was too far north for many of the Peloponnesian states, whose preference was to defend themselves at the Isthmus. By the time Xerxes finally arrived at the pass in mid-August many Greeks were being drawn to the Olympic Games, while the Spartans were once again constrained by rituals which forbade fighting. This time, however, a small Spartan force led by king Leonidas and his personal guard of 300 did set out, but, even when joined by allies, the total defending force at Thermopylae was still only 6,000–7,000.

There remained the danger that the Persian fleet might move down the coast beyond the pass and land troops in the Greeks' rear. Possibly as early as 481 the Greeks had agreed that the Persian fleet should be met off Cape Artemisium, on the northern tip of Euboea. The beach was level there and launching was easy, while, if things went wrong, a safe retreat could always be made between Euboea and the mainland. The main disadvantage was that this was open sea and the Greeks risked being surrounded by the much larger Persian fleet. Nevertheless, the naval effort was substantial. Athens sent her entire force of 200 triremes. With 200 men a trireme, this represented a formidable total of 40,000 men. If a fourth- or third-century inscription, 'The Decree of Themistocles', found at Troezen as recently as 1959, is to be trusted as an account of Athenian activities (it is probably a reasonably accurate copy of the original or a composite of several decrees inscribed in the third century BC), her skilled rowers had been divided into crews in the autumn of 481 with Athenian soldiers being added to the crews so that they could have a thorough training over the winter. Another 70 triremes from the Peloponnese joined the Athenians. The whole fleet was under the control of the Spartan Eurybiades, a commoner, as there was a taboo on Spartan kings commanding at sea.

The Persians had lingered in the north during the summer, consolidating their supply lines and consuming the harvest as it ripened. It was early August by the time they moved towards southern Greece. Already the weather was turning. As the Persian triremes rowed their way down the coast towards Euboea they were caught in four days of storms. Many ships were sunk or wrecked on the exposed shore of Magnesia, but when the Greeks at Artemisium finally saw the survivors appear and head for the Gulf of Pagasai to refit, they could see that the fleet was still much larger than theirs.

Xerxes had now reached Thermopylae with his armies. He decided that he would launch a joint attack on land and sea on the 17th. His naval plan was to split his fleet. One part would face the Greeks directly at Artemisium while the other part, of 200 selected ships, would row round the east coast of Euboea, then move up the channel behind the Greek fleet to catch them in a pincer. It proved a disaster. A storm arose on the night of the 17th as the Persians rounded the south-eastern edge of Euboea. The entire fleet of 200 ships were driven on a lee shore. The remaining Persian fleet eventually attacked on the 19th but the battle was inconclusive.

Meanwhile, Xerxes had stormed the entrance to Thermopylae for the first time on the 17th. Throughout that day and the next hard fighting took place in the nar-

row entrance to the pass with each side rotating its best troops. If anything the Spartans had the better of the combat, having perfected a method of appearing to retreat and then turning to cut down their pursuers. But it was on the 18th that Xerxes learnt, through a Greek informant, of a path through the mountains above the pass. He quickly exploited his knowledge. On that night, a full moon, several thousand of the Immortals were sent on a forced march along the mountain ridge. The defending force of Phocians heard their feet rustling through fallen oak leaves, but the Phocians were pushed aside and by early the next day Leonidas knew there was no hope of saving the pass. He sent away his allies and remained with his personal guard to face the inevitable end. By the evening of the 19th the battle was over with the Spartan force wiped out. Later a moving inscription was dedicated in the pass. 'Tell them in Lacedaemon, passer-by: Obedient to their orders, here we lie.' (See Paul Cartledge, *Thermopylae: The Battle that Changed the World*, London and New York, 2007, for an account of the battle and its legacy in western history.)

As the Persian army streamed down through the pass, the Greek fleet, now isolated to the north fell back. Attica could not now be held—its northern frontier was simply too long. The Greek troops moved back to the Isthmus, where thousands of men were constructing a wall of defence. Athens lay completely exposed. Most of her population had already been evacuated, possibly, if one interpretation of the dating of the events of 'The Decree of Themistocles' is right, as early as the autumn of 481 as part of a deliberate strategy of withdrawal. The city was almost deserted as the Persians entered on 27 September. The next morning the remainder of the Persian fleet, having rowed 300 kilometres from the Gulf of Pagasai, arrived on the broad beaches of Phaleron below the city. As they rested on the beach they must have rejoiced to see the flames rising from the Acropolis, which was now being thoroughly sacked and its few defenders massacred. It would have seemed that Xerxes had triumphed.

The Greek fleet had now made its base on the island of Salamis. It was vulnerable here. One of the first commands of Xerxes when he arrived on the coast had been to order the digging of a mole across the channel. If the fleet was blocked in from the south by the mole and the Persian fleet sent round to guard the western entrance of the Bay of Eleusis, then the Greek fleet would be trapped. Time was not on the Greeks' side in any case. There were 80,000 men on the island as well as a large number of refugees from the city. They could not be fed for ever. The Spartan commander, Eurybiades, certainly felt that the best plan was to get the Greek fleet, now numbering 379 triremes, safely away to the Isthmus.

His opponent in the debate that followed was Themistocles, who knew that the abandonment of the last piece of Athenian territory would be disastrous for the city. He used the Athenian triremes as a bargaining tool, threatening to withdraw them from the Greek fleet, if the order was given to retreat. Eurybiades gave in. It was now that Themistocles showed the cunning for which he was famous. He knew that battle had to come quickly if Salamis was to be saved. His task was to make sure it came on Greek terms, in narrow waters where the Greek superiority in ramming

tactics could be best exploited, if possible against tired crews. This meant forcing the Persian fleet to row its way up the Salamis Channel.

Themistocles played on the hopes and ambitions of Xerxes. He sent Xerxes a slave with the news that the Greek fleet was demoralized and full of dissension and that it was about to escape westwards by night. This was enough to raise Xerxes' hopes that he could destroy it once and for all. On the night of 28 September a squadron of Egyptian ships was sent to the western end of the bay to wait for the emerging Greeks, while at the eastern end, around midnight, Persian ships also moved across the entrance to the Channel. Themistocles now had to lure them in. As dawn broke on the 29th, a detachment of 70 Greek ships was sent northwards, as if in flight, in full view of the Persians, including Xerxes, who was watching the manoeuvres from a 'throne' on the hillside. It was enough to encourage the Persian fleet, made up mainly of Phoenicians, to move into the channel. It was in thirteen rows. By the afternoon the rowers had been more than twelve hours at sea. As they moved inexorably onwards, with no chance of retreat in the narrow waters, they saw to their horror the main Greek fleet emerging from the shelter of the shore and turning, united and fresh, towards them. At the same time a southerly wind was blowing up a swell. It caused the high-decked Phoenician ships to roll horribly, exposing their sides to the bronze rams of the Athenian triremes.

The battle is described by a messenger in Aeschylus' play *The Persians*:

A Greek ship charged first and sheared off the whole high stern of a Phoenician ship and every captain drove his ship against another ship. To begin with the onward flowing Persian fleet held their own; but when the mass of ships was congested in the narrows, and there was no means of helping one another, and they were smashed by one another's rams sheathed in bronze, then they shivered their whole array of oars, and the Greek ships intelligently encircled them and battered them from every angle. Ships turned turtle, piles of wreckage and dead men hid the sea from sight, corpses were awash on shores and reefs, and the entire barbarian fleet rowed away in disorderly flight. (Translation: N. G. L. Hammond)

One source claims that the Persians had lost over 200 ships as against 40 for the Greeks. Although the contribution of the Aeginetan and Corinthian triremes had been significant, the Athenians proclaimed Salamis as their victory, won by them on behalf of the people of Greece. As the lyric poet Simonides of Ceos put it:

The valour of these men shall beget glory for ever undiminished, so long as the gods allot rewards for courage. For on foot and on the swift-moving ships they kept all Greece from seeing the dawn of slavery. (Translation: N. G. L. Hammond)

In fact, the war was far from over. Although Herodotus saw the Battle of Salamis as the decisive moment of the war (and he is echoed by Barry Strauss, *The Battle of Salamis: The Naval Encounter that Saved Greece—and Western Civilization*, New York and London, 2005), it was not conclusive. The Persian army was still intact and holding a substantial part of mainland Greece. Even after Salamis, the Persian navy was still larger than the Greek, and it retreated for the winter to safe harbours in Samos and Symi in the eastern Aegean. Xerxes returned home for the winter, but he left his great royal pavilion behind under the care of his commander, Mardonius,

suggesting he would return the next spring with fresh forces. Mardonius was left for the winter with 100,000 men, a larger force than any the Greeks could raise.

The war might now have become a stalemate. The Peloponnesians could shelter, they hoped indefinitely, behind the fortifications of the Isthmus, leaving the Athenians as refugees on Salamis. There was little incentive for the Peloponnesians to venture further north. When campaigning began again the next summer the Peloponnese would, however, be vulnerable to a naval attack.

It was this fear that gave the Athenians their trump card. They had been offered an alliance by the Persians on terms which included the restoration of Attica and their city ruins to them. Many Athenians were tempted (the neighbouring city of Thebes had already changed sides), but Herodotus records the Athenians turning down the Persian offer with the famous riposte that proclaimed the common identity of the Greek people in their culture, religion, language, and customs, and hence the impossibility of a betrayal of this shared heritage. The chance that Athens might accept the Persian offer could, however, be dangled before the Spartans. In the summer of 479 a high-level Athenian mission to Sparta finally persuaded the Spartans that if Athens was to remain loyal she needed help. The Spartans were cautious about leaving the Peloponnese. There was always the fear of a helot uprising and suspicion that Argos, which was rumoured to be in the pay of Mardonius, might attack when the army was in the north. In the event, 5,000 Spartan hoplites, 5,000 *perioikoi*, and 35,000 helots under the command of Pausanias, the regent, moved quietly across the Isthmus. The Athenians sent 8,000 hoplites to join them.

Xerxes had never returned, but Mardonius was an experienced general. Xerxes had never allowed his cavalry, which provided him with one of his main advantages over the Greeks, to be used effectively. Mardonius withdrew north from Attica, which he had devastated to prevent the Athenians raising a harvest, to Boeotia, where the ground was more open and suitable for horses. The Greeks followed him and complicated manoeuvring ensued, with each side seeking to exploit the ground most favourable to it. Mardonius stuck at first to open ground, hoping that the Greek forces, which by now were made up of hoplites from over twenty cities, would break up. The Greeks concentrated on keeping to higher ground, where they were relatively secure from cavalry charges. Finally, near the town of Plataea, the Greeks were forced to retreat from their positions to secure better sources of food and water. Mardonius carelessly interpreted the retreat as a flight and sent in his troops in pursuit. He was suddenly faced with determined resistance, above all from the Spartan contingent. By the end of the day Mardonius and the flower of his troops lay dead and the treasures of the Persian headquarters lay in Greek hands. One Persian contingent fled back to Asia so fast that it outstripped the news of the defeat that followed it. Plataea was overwhelmingly a Spartan victory. The Athenian troops played little part at all—one reason why this battle, the most decisive of all of the Persian wars, was never eulogized by their propagandists.

Ever since the demoralizing experience of Salamis, the remaining Persian fleet had been idle, staying along the eastern Aegean coast. It did not dare move back towards the Greek mainland for fear that the Ionian Greeks would rise once again

in revolt as it left. With so many of the Phoenicians lost at Salamis, much of the fleet was now made up of Greek ships and they could hardly be trusted. The Greeks' own fleet now moved across the Aegean to deal with it. They found their enemies with their ships beached on the shore at Mycale and no stomach left for a fight. The ships were easily destroyed.

Victory was now complete, and the jubilant fleet sailed northwards, drawing islands such as Samos, Chios, and Lesbos into the Greek alliance. The Athenian triremes then made for the Hellespont with the aim of breaking down Xerxes' great bridge so that Persians could neither retreat into Asia nor be effectively reinforced. It had already collapsed, probably under the impact of storms. The Spartans by now had sailed home, but the Athenians remained to liberate the Hellespont, an area vital for them as a route through which their corn supplies came. Among the booty were the great ropes that had held the Hellespont bridge, found at Cardia. They were towed back to Athens as a trophy of war.

'The great Persian invasion of 480–479 BC made a unique impact on the Greek imagination', wrote the Greek scholar John Herington. 'Fifth century Greek lyric poets, wall painters and sculptors, who, like the tragedians, traditionally worked through mythology alone to express their visions of life, made an exception for the Persian Wars, for these were felt at once to possess the same exemplary and universal quality as the myths inherited from the far past.' Traditionally, in scholarship, the Persian Wars have been seen as a turning point in the history of western 'civilization'. It was the Scottish philosopher John Stuart Mill who called the Battle of Marathon a more important event in *English* history than the Battle of Hastings.

Above all, the wars have been seen as launching classical civilization. It pays to be cautious here. The essential elements of Greek culture were in place before the Persian invasions. The *polis* was well established and politics had already reached a high level of maturity. There was a fine tradition of craftsmanship shown across a wide variety of materials. The poetic tradition was a sophisticated one, and drama had been born in sixth-century Athens. In Ionia the foundations of abstract theorizing had been laid. The Persian Wars did not therefore create Greek culture. What they did do was help define this culture more sharply and boost the self-confidence of the Greeks, above all that of the Athenians.

The wars allowed a resurgence of the old aristocratic values, *arete*, glory, manliness, and valour. The mound built over the 192 heroes who had fallen at Marathon still stands, if much reshaped, while it has been argued that the celebrated frieze of the Parthenon depicts the heroes of the battle being received by the gods. A picture of the battle adorned the *Stoa Poikile*, the Painted Stoa, in the Agora, and a 13-metre-high statue of Athena was erected on the Acropolis in honour of the victories. To ensure the wider Greek world appreciated what had been achieved the Athenians built a treasury at Delphi from the spoils of victory. Some years later, perhaps about 450, a bronze group of gods and heroes from Athens's past, including Athena and Theseus, the hero always associated with the coming of democracy, with Miltiades added to them, was placed in front of the treasury. It is possible that the famous Riace warriors, two life-size bronze figures of the highest quality, later

looted by the Romans and found off the coast of Italy in 1972, were from this monument.

Once the second invasion had been defeated, Athens again claimed the glory. Another epigram of Simonides laments the Athenian dead at Plataea:

If to die well is the greater part of valour, fortune granted this to us above all men. For in our eagerness to clothe Greece in liberty, we lie in unaging good repute. (Translation: N. G. L. Hammond)

Poets (such as the Spartan Tyrtaeus) had talked before of the beauty of dying for one's city. Simonides (who was not an Athenian but came from the small island of Ceos) was the first to link the giving of life with the saving of liberty. Here was a rich legacy for Europe, as countless twentieth-century war memorials attest.

One result of the victories was that the maintenance of 'liberty' became an essential element of the Greek consciousness. Herodotus, for instance, re-creates a conversation between the Athenian commander at Marathon, Miltiades, and Callimachus, the war archon, who had the casting vote when the decision was made to attack. 'It is now in your hands, Callimachus, either to enslave Athens, or to make her free and to leave behind you for all future generations a memory more glorious than even Harmodius and Aristogeiton [the murderers of the brother of the tyrant Hipparchus in 514] left.' (The Athenians erected a monument to Callimachus on the Acropolis, fragments of which have recently been put on display in the Acropolis Museum.) The freedom that Miltiades was referring to was the sovereign freedom of a state to conduct its affairs through its own citizens and without outside interference as well as the freedom for citizens to act in their own city. The same point is made in another re-created conversation, this time between Xerxes and the exiled Spartan king Demaratus, in which Demaratus contrasts the freedom of the Spartans, a freedom restrained only by the law, with the despotism of the Persian king. Sparta hardly enjoyed what anyone could call freedom in the sense of individual liberty and human rights, but the point that Greeks lived under constitutions while the Persians lived under arbitrary rule was a fair one.

However, the contrast could easily degenerate into racism. In a denigration of the barbarian, the late fifth-century Hippocrates of Cos talked of the mental flabbiness and cowardice of the Asiatic, partly as a result of their climate and partly because they were subject to tyrannical rule: 'Even if a man is born brave and of stout heart, his character is ruined by this form of government.' The same theme is used by Aristotle in his analysis of slavery where he contrasts the 'spirited and intelligent' Greeks with the Asians (see further below, p. 228). (See Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy*, Oxford, 1991.)

Another point has to be made. The Persian Wars are often seen as the moment when the Greeks acquired their true identity. For those cities who played a major part in the conflict this may have been true. However, only between thirty and forty of the 700 or so Greek cities around the Aegean are known to have resisted the Persians. The victory may have been a great one, but to see it solely in terms of Greeks versus barbarians is too simplistic, however much this may have been the image put forward in the propaganda of the victors.

Persia was not suddenly excluded from the Greek world. Its defeats may have been a humiliation but they were not threatening to the immediate survival of the empire. While it is possible to see, in hindsight, that a long period of decline set in after 479, Persia was still there to be feared or used. In fact, the two sides were still considered to be at war for another twenty-five years while Persian money was sought by participants in the endless Greek conflicts of the fifth and fourth centuries. The word 'medism' (the Greeks failed to distinguish between Persians and Medes) was used to condemn an opponent as having pro-Persian, often merely aristocratic, sympathies and was a political rallying cry for decades to come. What no one could possibly have predicted, however, was that 170 years later a military genius from the outlying regions of the Greek world, Alexander of Macedon, would actually revenge the Greeks for Xerxes' ambitions and destroy the empire that had attacked them.

When the golden thistle is in flower and the noisy cicada sitting in the trees pours down its clear song thick and fast from under its wings in the fatiguing summer season, then goats are fattest and wine is best, women are most lustful, but men are weakest, because Sirios parches their head and knees and their skin is dried out with the heat. Then you want rocky shade and wine from Byblos, barley bread made with milk and meat of a scrub-grazed heifer and of firstborn kids.

(Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 582–92)

It is easy to get carried away with the dramatic narratives of the Persian Wars and the impressive cultural changes that accompanied the classical period of Greece. In fact, for most Greeks life depended on the back-breaking cultivation of the land in an environment, in mainland Greece at least, that offered little encouragement for the farmer. Ninety per cent of the population of ancient Greece cultivated the land and had no other option if their city was to survive. These are the forgotten Greeks, barely mentioned in the literature and their scratchings on the surface of the soil hardly noticed by archaeologists. It is only since the 1970s that what little has survived in Greek sources about working the land has been correlated with the findings of field surveys to bring to life the farming activities of the Greek world. (See Robin Osborne, *Classical Landscape with Figures*, London, 1987; chapter 5, ‘The Countryside’, in Christopher Mee, *Greek Archaeology: A Thematic Approach*, Oxford and Malden, Mass., 2011; and for the ancient Greek economy in general, chapters 12 to 14 in Walter Scheidel et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World*, Cambridge and New York, 2007.)

The primary unit for production, the storage of goods, and their consumption in the Greek world was the *oikos*, or household. (The Greeks used the word *oikonomia* to describe the management of a household and its possessions and this is the source of the English word ‘economy’.) *Oikos* was an elastic term. It might refer to the actual house itself, the household including family and slaves, or even the house with its surrounding land. The most common form of landownership in ancient Greece was the small plot, the *kleros*, a share inherited by a son from his father. The owner and his family might be the only workers on it but one or two slaves seem to have been usual. Five hectares was the minimum needed to sustain a family. Wealthier landowners cultivated up to 25 hectares (in Athenian surveys) or 45 hectares (in surveys of Sparta where a steady fall in the number of citizens led to land holdings becoming larger for each). These larger landholdings were divided into

smaller plots to maximize the potential from different environments. The large 'prestige' estate was not known in Greece until Roman times.

The Greek farming year had two periods of intensive activity. From September to November the olives and grapes were gathered, just at the same time as the ploughing and the sowing of seed took place for the next year. There were few religious festivals then and the Athenian Assembly met rarely. The harvesting of grain took place in May or June. There were two important slack times, in early spring and from July to September, when the harvest had been gathered in. It was in these times that the great games of the Greek world were held, the Isthmian Games in the spring and the others in the autumn. Fighting also took place in these periods. The Persian Wars, as has been seen, were fought in the autumn, the Persian forces of 480 having entered Greece at the time when there was ample food for them to plunder. Men and their animals could also be diverted to building projects. Accounts from the Athenian sanctuary of Demeter at Eleusis show almost all construction took place in the slack periods, particularly after the harvest. Oxen were also available then. Sixty-six are recorded as being drafted in to drag one column of marble.

In general the soil in Greece is poor. The Greeks harmed their environment further through the destruction of their forests as they cleared them for farming. Plato talks of the loss of the mountain forests of Attica in his own lifetime. Land erodes quickly when trees are lost but the greatest challenge faced by all farmers in Greece, then as now, is the unpredictability of rainfall. A good yield depended on frequent turning and weeding if moisture was to be retained, but instruments were primitive and the work must have been back-breaking. The ard, a rudimentary form of plough, always made of wood with perhaps an iron tip, would only cut through, not turn, the soil, and turning had to be completed as a separate task. Oxen might help with the ploughing, but most tasks, from pruning to harvesting the various crops, cereals, grapes, and olives, had to be done by hand.

The land available to a *polis* was known as the *chora* and typically it was made up of a variety of environments, plains, hillsides that could be improved with terracing, hillsides which could not be cultivated but might be used as pasture, and mountains which were totally barren. Each city had a different mix of lands and had to plot its survival accordingly. Studies of the property of a group of Athenian aristocrats in the late fifth century, for instance, showed that, typically, they had land scattered throughout Attica as well as beyond the state. Field survey evidence now shows, however, that in the fifth and fourth centuries plots were being consolidated to achieve greater economy of scale and that animals were being pastured on them and their manure used for fertilizer. This suggests the emergence of a more intensive and, possibly, more market-orientated agricultural economy. This was the time when population density in the countryside appears to have been at its greatest.

However, once one looks at settlement patterns in different parts of Greece it is their variety that stands out. The ingenuity of the peasant farmer means that land was exploited in whatever way led to better yields. Survival meant not only producing a surplus of crops but actually protecting the *kleros* itself. Many surveys have shown a countryside dotted with towers. Their purpose is not always clear: they

may have been watchtowers (an early warning system against attack by a neighbouring city), a strong room for valuables, or even simply a mark of ownership. The accompanying farmstead, from the limited evidence that survives, had a courtyard in which corn would be ground, an enclosure for animals, and rooms for storage. Some may even have been left in the hands of slaves with the owners visiting from time to time as their activities in the city allowed. One study, of the southern Argolid in the Peloponnese, suggested that less than half of the population lived permanently in the countryside—city life was more attractive.

In terms of calorie yield cereals were the most important source of nutrition. Barley was the most popular cereal as it requires only half as much rainfall as wheat. (This made wheat bread a luxury, to be found mainly on the tables of the aristocratic *symposia*.) Studies of farming in Neolithic Greece suggest that a yield of 1,000 kilos of grain could be raised per hectare. There is some evidence that grains were larger by classical times, but there would still have been a significant shortfall of grain requirements in Attica each year, one reason why the trade routes to the cereal-growing areas of the north Aegean and Black Sea became so important for Athens by the fifth century BC. The most widespread crop was the olive. Its deep roots and narrow leaves were well suited to a climate of hot sun and low rainfall. Its oil could be used for cooking, lighting, and even as a form of soap, and could be traded to areas such as the Crimea and Egypt where olives did not grow. It grew alongside the vine, another of the staples of the Greek economy.

Animals also formed an essential part of the agricultural economy. Sheep and goats could be pastured on higher ground or along the borders of the city-state. Ownership of the land was not required, so flocks would range widely. Once these animals had passed through the rituals of sacrifice (see p. 241), they provided most of the protein needed by the population. All the raw materials for clothing were available from wool and leather. There were settlements in the hills wholly concerned with making cloth, leather goods, and cheese.

The farmer would plan for a small surplus, partly of course through prudence, but also to supply dowries for his daughters, contributions to collective feasts, and as a means of buying pottery, salt, fish, and metals. If the evidence that landholdings were being consolidated from the fifth century is true, this surplus might be gained from the marketing of produce. One could infer, from the evidence of terracing, which is labour and cost intensive, for instance, that there must have been some commercial incentive for improving production.

Industries, Crafts, and Trade

Mining was the most important industrial activity in Greece. Iron ore could be found locally and smelted for tools and weapons. Precious metals, gold and silver, were used by the state for large-scale enterprises such as paying mercenaries and, particularly from the late sixth century onwards, for coins to oil transactions of everyday commercial life. The silver mines in Attica are the best known as they

underpinned the success of Athens as a naval and political power. The ancient remains have been carefully surveyed. Around 2,000 shafts have been located around Laurium, some over 120 metres in depth with many kilometres of tunnels. Records from the fourth century show that 200 Athenians were then involved in taking out concessions. They could borrow the substantial amounts of money required (at 12 per cent interest in one recorded case) and then approach a slave-owner for the lease of labour. The historian Xenophon mentions one contractor with a thousand slaves available for hire, but they were often used so harshly by their hirers that their life expectancy was short. The most arduous task was crushing the silver ore, washing, and separating it—the remains of the ancient washeries have been found. In an arid region the required water was stored from winter rainfall in cisterns.

Even richer than the Athenian mines were those of Chalcidice and the Rhodope massif in the northern Aegean. In addition to silver, they held the only Greek-controlled source of gold. While the total Athenian production in a year has been calculated at 65 talents, individual mines within this area are said to have produced 1,000 talents worth of precious metal each year at the height of production in the fourth century. These mines later fell under the control of Macedonia, which is one reason why this remote kingdom on the north of the Greek world became so powerful in the fourth century under the energetic leadership of Philip II. (See Chapter 18.) Over Greece as a whole, extensive excavations together with the burning of woodland for smelting had a major impact on local environments. Parts of Cyprus have never recovered the forests destroyed in ancient times to provide wood for smelting copper.

Manufacturing was widespread in the Greek world. Most of it was local, drawing on raw materials such as wool, iron ore, and clay and processing them for immediate sale. One study found 170 different occupations being followed in Athens. Everything was done on a small scale and technology was virtually unknown. The largest workshop recorded in Athens made shields and employed 320 workers. Of two workshops owned by the father of the orator Demosthenes, one employed thirty slaves making knives, the other twenty joiners making beds. There were probably no more than 200 workers in the Athenian potters' quarter, the Ceramicus, at one time. The Greeks had no tradition of applying their scientific understanding to creating more efficient ways of production. Even coins were made in an unsophisticated way with each one stamped individually. Weaving was always done in the home.

By the sixth century trade routes were busy. The trick was to find routes where new goods could be loaded as the original ones were sold (as in the Uluburun cargo of so many centuries earlier) but the patterns of trade and the quantities of goods transported have proved difficult to measure. The evidence from shipwrecks, unlike that from later periods, is still limited. All traces of the probable staples, slaves, grain, livestock, timber, have disappeared, but it is clear that commerce was based on small-scale free enterprise, with individuals taking responsibility for raising and managing their own voyages. Athens was certainly a boom town in the middle of the fifth century while Byzantium (at the mouth of the Black Sea), Rhodes, and Corinth were important centres of exchange. By the fourth century there is more

evidence of loans being made, with Athens offering some legal protection to investors. The city had long insisted on goods being assessed against official measures and even attempted to impose standard weights and measures across her empire.

The single largest commodity in the Mediterranean was grain shipped from those areas that had a consistent surplus, the Black Sea, Egypt, and Italy, to those that could not depend on one. As demand and deforestation spread, the search for timber became a major factor in economic strategy. So Athens probed the coasts of the northern Aegean (her colony at Amphipolis sheltered under heavily wooded mountains) while the rich resources of Sicily provided a motivation for the expedition there in 415. The Spartans, eager to build their own navy against Athens, were promised access to the forests of Phrygia by the Persians.

Metal ores were also important, and in some cases their sources can now be pinpointed. Silver for the first Athenian coinage, for example, came from Thrace, not the Laurium mines in Athens. The trade in pottery, or rather high-quality ceramics, is now well plotted. After the grain ships were unloaded, they were filled with ceramics. (The word 'ceramic' derives from the Greek *keramos*, 'pottery', hence *Kerameikos*, Ceramicus, the potters' quarter of Athens.) So large quantities of black-glaze pottery from Athens were sold in Thasos in the northern Aegean. Different markets had different tastes. One late sixth-century group of Athenian potters, the so-called Perizoma group, produced designs specifically aimed at Etruscan markets. They put loincloths on athletes in deference to Italian sensitivities about nudity and transformed conventional pictures of Athenian *symposia* into Etruscan funerary scenes. In Spain and southern France black-glazed ware from Athens was especially popular. A distinctive vessel, the *kernos*, a pottery base with attachments for votive offerings, was produced for the north African market. Meanwhile datable *amphorae* of wine from the island of Chios show that the major markets shifted from the western Mediterranean in the sixth century to the eastern in the fifth with the Athenians developing a particular taste for Chian wine.

So there was much economic opportunism with both producers and shippers adapting to new demands. The Athenian comic poet Hermippus recorded some of the many goods that were coming into Athens in the late fifth century. There was silphium from Cyrene, mackerel and other fish from the Hellespont, sail cloth and papyrus ropes from Egypt, and ivory from Libya. Then there were the fruits: raisins and dried figs from Rhodes, pears and fine apples from Euboea, hazelnuts and almonds from the Gulf of Pagasai in the northern Aegean, and dates from Phoenicia. Carthage provided blankets and embroidered cushions. This is a world of sophisticated tastes. (See further Léopold Migeotte, *The Economy of the Greek Cities: From the Archaic Period to the Early Roman Empire* (trans. Jane Lloyd), Berkeley and London, 2009.)

Women in the Greek World

The Greeks were deeply ambivalent about women. They recognized that as the ones who bore children and tended the hearth, they were at the centre of settled living.

An Athenian woman who was a citizen herself and married to one was allowed to pass on the privileged status to her children and so held a crucial place in society. Yet women were also seen as 'other', passionate and emotional, violent and untrustworthy in their sexual instincts. Convention, and, it would be argued by the fifth-century Athenian male, prudence required that the wife be segregated in the home. (See, as introductions, Susan Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece*, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1995 and Sarah Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, New York, 1995.)

The male Greek's fantasies and fears of women were well represented in drama. Here is further evidence that the Greeks saw women as capable of intense emotion, emotions which could be manipulated by the playwright to explore the furthest boundaries of human behaviour. Greek tragedy is full of strong women, Medea, Phaedra, Antigone, Electra, who exhibit the full range of lust, defiance, and revenge that, for cultural reasons, it may have been difficult to attribute to male characters. However, the playwrights were also able to show some empathy for the condition of women, as in the famous speech given by Euripides to Medea:

Of all things that are living and can form a judgement we women are the most unfortunate creatures. Firstly, with an excess of wealth it is required for us to buy a husband and take for our bodies a master; for not to take one is even worse. And now the question is serious whether we take a good or bad one; for there is no easy escape for a woman, nor can she say no to her marriage. She arrives among new modes of behaviour and manners, and needs prophetic power, unless she has learned at home, how best to manage him who shares the bed with her. And if we work this out well and carefully, and the husband lives with us and lightly bears his yoke, then life is enviable. If not, I'd rather die. A man, when he's tired of the company in his home, goes out of the house and puts an end to his boredom and turns to a friend or companion of his own age. But we are forced to keep our eyes on one alone. What they say of us is that we have a peaceful time living at home, while they do the fighting in war. How wrong they are. I would very much rather stand three times in the front of battle than bear one child. (Translation: Simon Goldhill)

(There may be much truth in the final two lines. One calculation from the evidence of Greek skeletons suggests that the average lifespan of adult women was thirty-six years, compared to the forty-five of men (although more sophisticated analysis may raise these figures). Early death from childbearing seems the most likely explanation. There is also evidence that girl babies were more likely to be exposed to die than boys.)

Whatever the reality of women's lives in Greece, they themselves have left little record of it. When they speak, above all in tragic drama, they do so through men's voices. In short it is hard to know what Athenian wives really felt as they sat together in the women's quarters of the cramped and probably smelly houses that were typical of urban Athens. They may have taken some satisfaction in their status as citizens and mothers of citizens-to-be. On the other hand, they may have yearned to enjoy the freedom of the *hetairai*, the courtesans who attended the *symposia* and who sometimes established stable relationships with young aristocrats. However successful in the short term, however, the *hetaira's* life depended on her looks and

charm. She was vulnerable to pregnancy (and the child could never be recognized as a citizen, although the Athenian Pericles did manage to achieve citizenship for his son by his mistress, Aspasia, by special decree) and disease, and when her lover married she would be discarded. The best-documented case in Athens is one Neaera. Neaera had been born a slave girl but had worked her way up so successfully that one of her lovers, an up-and-coming politician, Stephanos, tried to pass her off as his legitimate wife and her daughters by previous relationships as Athenian citizens. In the ensuing court case (brought by a rival of Stephanos, wishing to discredit him with the truth about his wife) Neaera's previous life was revealed in sordid detail and was clearly one in which she had suffered sexual abuse. One previous lover had even had sex with her openly at a *symposium*, 'making his privilege a display to the onlookers'.

As this case suggests, sex was freely available for men in Athens. Xenarchus, a fourth-century dramatist, describes the city prostitutes 'basking in the sun, their breasts uncovered, stripped for action'. As in many such societies (Victorian England comes to mind) the purity of the wife is maintained alongside a flurry of sexual activity in the back streets. In Athens the 'pure' citizen wife, whose life is described below, contrasts with those who have to use their bodies to survive. 'Mistresses we have for pleasure, concubines for daily service to our body, but wives for the procreation of legitimate children and to be faithful guardians of the household,' as one Athenian put it.

Every Athenian woman had her protector, the *kyrios*, either a male relative before she was married or her husband. 'Her' property, outside her immediate possessions of clothes and jewellery, was in his care and she could undertake only the most modest of transactions on her own behalf. For a conventional Athenian woman the most important moment of transition was marriage. The experience consisted of being taken at a young age, just after puberty, into a relationship with an older man, in a strange home. A fragment from one of Sophocles' plays records the experience:

Unmarried girls, in my own opinion, have the sweetest existence known to mortals in their fathers' homes, for their innocence always keeps such children safe and happy. But when we reach puberty and can understand we are thrust out and sold away from our ancestral gods and from our parents. Some go to strange men's homes, others to foreigners, some to joyless houses, some to hostile. And all this once the first night has yoked us to our husband we are forced to praise and say all is well. (Translation: Oswyn Murray)

The fragment is written, like almost all comments on women, by a man, but it makes the point that women, unlike men, entered a form of exile when they married. Solon had recommended that men marry between the ages of 28 and 35, when they were past the peak of their strength and should rightly consider the future of their family. Girls might be ten to fifteen years younger. This discrepancy may have been deliberate, to ensure the dominance of males who were, at their age of marriage, sophisticated and well used to public life, over women who, in the words of one source, 'had been closely supervised in order that they would see as little as

possible, hear as little as possible and learn as little as possible'. There were also medical theories that childbearing was safest for a younger mother (while, in contrast, male sperm became more potent with age) and that sexual intercourse was the best answer to the emotional upheavals of female adolescence.

As in most traditional societies, love played little part in the choosing of partners. Marriage partners were usually chosen from within a relatively small circle of families known to each other. The bride's family had to provide a dowry, and it was the passing over of this, into the complete control of the bridegroom, that formalized the agreement. The preservation of property within a family was another important factor. It would normally pass only through the male line, but a woman who had no brothers was assigned a special status, that of *epikleros*, because she went with the estate (*kleros*). So that her inheritance would not be lost to the family, she could be married to the nearest of her male relations who would have her. (A paternal uncle would often come forward.) Even if she was already married, a new marriage could be formed to preserve the inheritance, so long as the first marriage was childless.

Inevitably, as with every moment of transition in Greek life, marriage involved rituals. The bride took a purifying bath before being taken in a formal procession with the bridegroom and his best friend in a cart to the bridegroom's home. The bride would be greeted by the bridegroom's mother and then go through the formalities of welcome to a new home before the couple retired for the physical consummation of the marriage. The importance of the wife as a bearer of children was underlined by the fact that her status in the new home improved once a son was born. 'When a child was born, then I began to trust her and I put her in charge of all my things, believing that the closest connections had been formed,' as one suitor in an Athenian law case put it. A marriage which was childless could be dissolved, and women did possess the right to divorce their husbands if their behaviour was particularly shameless.

The domestic arrangements of Greek families are not well documented. However, at Olynthos in northern Greece, the foundations of houses have been uncovered in a town that was destroyed by Philip of Macedon in 348. Typically, each house was closed off to the outside world, its exterior walls provided with relatively few windows. The men's room, the *andron*, was near the main door so that visitors could be entertained without having to intrude on the more secluded quarters of the women. The space of the house was itself sacrosanct—it was always a charged moment when a woman in a tragedy stepped over the threshold and a matter of great offence if an outsider entered a house and came upon its womenfolk unawares. In larger houses there would be a courtyard where the women could sew and weave on warm days, and here there would also be ample space for the storage of the family's oil, wine, and grain. The reserved space for women did, however, allow the wife to be given a prominent role in everyday management. The charismatic heroine Praxagora, speaking when disguised as a man in Aristophanes' play *Ecclesiazusae*, argues 'that we should hand over the city to the women. After all, we already employ them as managers and stewards of our households.' 'Women are better than men,' says another female character in one of Euripides' plays, 'they manage the

house and guard within the home goods brought from over the sea. No house is clean and prosperous without a wife. And in dealings with the gods—I judge these of prime importance—we play the greatest part.’ (See further Lisa Nevett, *House and Society in the Ancient Greek World*, Cambridge and New York, 1999.)

There were occasions, mainly religious festivals, in which women could participate in their own right. The Thesmophoria, the most widespread of the Greek festivals, was celebrated entirely by women. The ritual in Athens lasted for three days, and the women withdrew to a sanctuary out of the sight of men. The sacrifices were of piglets, but there were also rituals in which phalluses were thrown into the earth and the remnants of sacrifices from earlier years brought out from the ground. This suggests elements of a fertility cult, although a period of sexual abstinence was also demanded even before the festival began. In accompanying rituals men were denounced in obscenities and there were legends of men who disturbed the rituals being castrated. ‘At the core of the festival’, writes Walter Burkert, in his study *Greek Religion* (Oxford and New York, 1991), ‘there remains the dissolution of the family, the separation of the sexes, and the constitution of a society of women; once a year at least women demonstrate their independence, their responsibility, and importance for the fertility of the community and the land.’ It could be argued that the Thesmophoria had the social function of legitimizing the oppression of women for the remainder of the year. There were other women’s festivals, the Haloa in January and the Skira in July that were linked to the agricultural year (the Skira with threshing, for instance), that suggested that women were recognized as ensuring the prosperity of the land. The most abandoned was the celebration of Dionysus, described by Euripides in his play *The Bacchae*, where the women, worked up to a frenzy through dancing, tear to pieces Pentheus, king of Thebes, who has come to spy on them. (See further Sue Blundell and M. Williamson (eds.), *The Sacred and the Feminine in Ancient Greece*, New York and London, 1998.)

The women of Sparta enjoyed (or were seen by outside observers to enjoy) a much freer life than their counterparts in Athens. Their husbands were preoccupied with their military training and often away at war and this may have given women far greater initiative in the management of their daily lives. It is also possible that Spartan women kept their own dowries, which enabled them to own land. (Aristotle claimed that two-fifths of the whole country belonged to women.) However, there is no doubt that the state saw the main role of women as producers of male children. They were expected to undergo physical training to make them stronger for their task. (The fact that they did so naked scandalized other Greeks.) Special privileges were given to those who had three or more sons.

Slavery

In many enterprises, those of building, mining, manufacturing, and work on the land, slaves carried out much of the labour. Slavery had long been widespread in the ancient world, the common fate, as Homer makes clear, of war captives and their

families. In the *Iliad*, Andromache foresees her fate as a slave if Hector is killed. However, as human beings seem to have been one of the few commodities the civilizations of the east would take from the Greeks in return for their luxury goods, a trade in slaves began. Thrace was the most important early provider of slaves (the Black Sea in general was a popular source) and then later the inland areas of Asia Minor. By the end of the fifth century Syrians were the most expensive, apparently on account of their intelligence.

It gradually became more common for the Greeks to keep slaves for themselves, and eventually they may have made up perhaps 30 per cent of the population of many cities. No one was exempt from slavery; even Greeks captured by other Greeks in war could be enslaved. Thucydides gives several examples of the women and children of defeated cities being enslaved after their men had been executed. (Chapters 2 to 9 in Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge (eds.), *The Cambridge History of World Slavery*, i: *The Ancient Mediterranean World* (Cambridge, 2011) cover slavery in the Greek world.)

The use of slaves was inextricably bound up with the Greeks' sense of their own exclusiveness. It was considered demeaning to be the servant of others, and by employing slaves the citizen was reinforcing his identity both as a free man and as a Greek. Slave labour also freed the citizen for political life. However, some justification had to be evolved for the practice. For the philosopher Aristotle, who explored the problem in his *Politics*, it was part of the natural order that there should be an elite who did the ruling and a slave class who carried out the labour on which civilized living depended (although he accepted that some disagreed with this view). 'One that can foresee with his mind is naturally ruler and naturally master, and one that can do these things with his body is subject and naturally a slave... the latter are strong for necessary service, the former erect and unserviceable for such occupations but serviceable for a life of citizenship.' However, a physical source for this slave labour had to be found, and this left Aristotle with little real option other than to define the difference in status between ruler and slave in ethnic terms. As he continued:

The nations inhabiting the cold places and those of Europe are full of spirit but somewhat deficient in intelligence and skill, so that they continue comparatively free, but lacking in political organization and capacity to rule their neighbours. The people of Asia on the other hand are intelligent and skilful in temperament, but lack spirit so that they are in continuous subjection and slavery. But the Greek race participates in both characters, just as it occupies the middle position geographically, for it is both spirited and intelligent: hence it continues to be free and to have very good political institutions and to be capable of ruling all mankind. (Translation: H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library edition)

According to Aristotle, therefore, slaves 'deserve' their position because they are outsiders. Many had, in fact, come in from 'barbarian' cultures and so had gone through traumatic experiences even before either set had started work for a Greek master. The slave's family had usually been broken up and the psychological shock of becoming an owned person must have been severe. What was added to the shock by the experience of day-to-day living as a slave is difficult to gauge. Within the home there were rituals and conventions that offered some protection to the slave.

He or she was welcomed with a ceremony in the new home, the *katakhusmata* (and, as a symbol of the fresh beginning in life, given a new name). In Athens, thanks to laws of Solon, it was thought an act of *hubris*, pride, to beat a slave unjustly, and killing a slave brought pollution, not just to the perpetrator but to the community as a whole. In his book on the household economy, the *Oeconomicus*, Xenophon states that the care of sick slaves is one of the responsibilities of an Athenian housewife. Manumission was possible, by public declaration. These conventions and natural altruism may have combined to make life tolerable, but one cannot be too optimistic. The comedies of Aristophanes suggest casual brutality was common. Sex by men with their female slaves was tolerated and, as the evidence in one lawsuit suggested, was not considered serious enough to justify a wife's infidelity. Even though it was the convention never to refer to the servile past of a freed man, manumitted slaves in Athens were treated as metics, outsiders, with no right to participate in politics or religious festivals.

Slavery can take various forms. Chattel slavery, the direct ownership of the slave, was the most common, but there were other forms of servitude such as that suffered by the helots in Sparta. Some idea of their status can be seen from a remark by Thucydides that 700 helots who had been raised to campaign with the Spartan king Brasidas (see p. 299) were rewarded by being made free and allowed to live where they wanted. This implies they were normally tied to the land and were seen as the servants of the state rather than of individual owners. They differed from the mass of chattel slaves, in that they were Greeks, lived in their own communities in lands that had traditionally been their own, and were allowed to retain at least part of their produce (the rest being handed over to the state). In other ways their lives were miserable. Plutarch describes how 'it was considered best to keep [the helots] constantly employed so as to crush their spirit by perpetual toil and hardship'. At each new election of ephors, there was a ritual by which war was declared against helots in general, and it appears that those who looked like emerging as leaders were systematically killed. One episode in the training of adolescent Spartans for war involved placing them in the countryside and giving them free rein to kill any helots they came across.

With the possible exception of Sparta, there was no distinct slave economy in ancient Greece (as there was, for instance, on the sugar and cotton plantations of the West Indies and the American South). Those slaves with skills could work alongside freemen and even citizens. The status of eighty-six of the skilled workforce is known from the records that survive of the construction of the Erechtheum in Athens. Twenty-four were citizens, twenty-four metics (foreigners of free status), and twenty slaves. The slaves worked as masons and carpenters and their labour was paid at the same rate as free men. The records of one trireme crew showed that it included about a hundred slaves and their owners were fellow members of the same crew. One disgruntled Athenian (the Old Oligarch) grumbled that it was impossible to distinguish slaves from free men in the streets. How far any slave was able to negotiate this lack of rigidity to achieve some feeling of independence is impossible to know.

A large number of slaves worked as domestic servants in the homes and, even if perhaps only 50 per cent of Athenians actually owned any slaves, it certainly seems

to have been the aspiration to have one or two. Here a slave might achieve some identity because of his or her skills or general usefulness. The prices of slaves reflected the skills they could provide and these skills could possibly provide them with manumission granted in return for a promise to continue to fulfil duties. Here again there were some possibilities of a human, if unequal and extremely vulnerable, relationship between owner and owned. Much less secure, however, were those unskilled slaves who found themselves working in larger groups in the fields, in workshops, or, worst of all, in the mines. Here there was little chance of preserving any individual identity and treatment appears to have been harsh. In the mines the slave seems to have been no more than an expendable instrument for obtaining the city's most sought-after source of wealth. Slaves also made up a large part of the population of common prostitutes.

Aristocratic Survivals

One of the major developments of the Archaic period was the erosion of the political power and status of the aristocrat. With cities now fighting with hoplite armies the aristocrat could no longer prove himself as a heroic warrior. The prestige coming from landed wealth was being challenged by the increase in trade. The aristocrat estate with its wasteful cattle economy had largely vanished by the seventh century. The poet Theognis, a Megaran aristocrat writing about 550 BC, expressed the views of a class who felt themselves under siege.

Kyrnos, our city is as it always was; its people, though, are different: the ones who used to have no concept of our laws or rules, but wrapped their ribs around with goatskin cloaks, and lived like deer outside the city walls, have now become the masters, while those who once were noble behave as cowards now. What a humiliating sight.

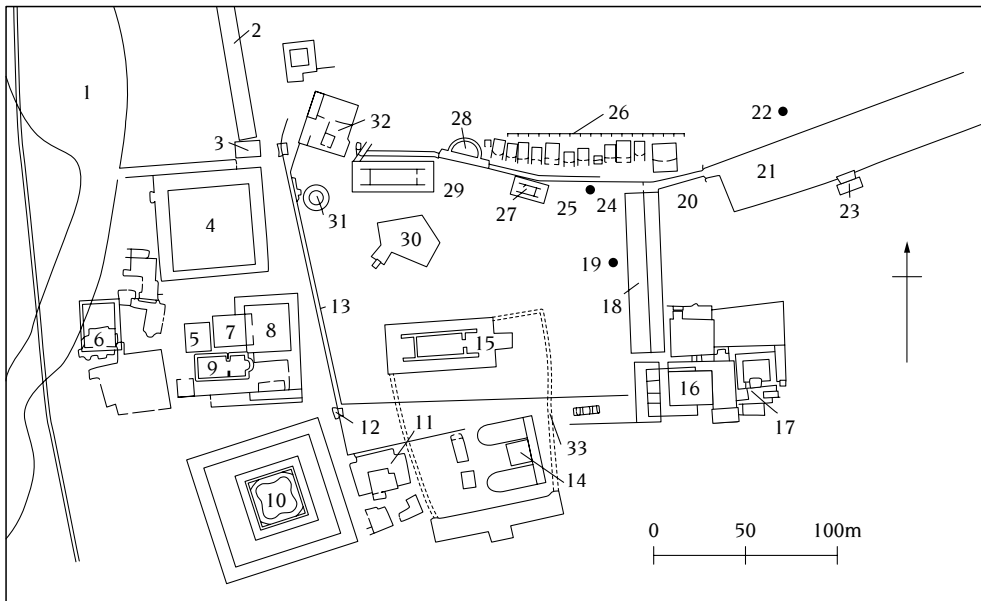
Over a hundred years later, Aristophanes, with his sympathies towards aristocratic life, contrasts the older coinage of silver and gold with the new debased coins of bronze. 'So with our citizens, those we know as noble, sensible, honest, decent men, reared in wrestling schools and choruses and culture, we reject, while for all purposes, we make use of those of base metal, aliens, redheads, scoundrels born of scoundrels, the latest arrivals, who formerly the city would not have easily used even as scapegoats.'

High birth is the defining factor of the *agathoi*, loosely translated as 'the good ones', but with connotations of physical excellence and skill in war. The rest are *kakoi*, 'the unworthy ones'. The *agathoi* need wealth because it is the only way that their position can be sustained. For the *kakoi*, however, wealth is seen as potentially corrupting (the *kakos* has not been brought up to know how to handle it and certainly he can never use it to transform himself into an *agathos*). Inter-marriage between classes, for Theognis, is anathema. The class of *agathoi* must be kept pure.

How can the *agathoi* maintain their status? One way is to mark their graves with the symbolic form of the nude hero, the *kouros* (see earlier p. 189). However a more

immediate access to status was required while they were still alive. Now that the old Homeric warrior contest was no more, aristocrats became obsessed with proving themselves through other forms of contests, *agones*. The early sixth century was the period when games spread through the Greek world. The Olympic Games, held every four years, were by then officially 200 years old but probably much older still. They had originated as a festival to the god Zeus, and the great temple to the god stood in a sacred enclosure around which the stadium, the race track for chariot races, the gymnasium, and the wrestling ring were grouped. Close to it was an ancient altar at which, at the central point of the Games, a hundred oxen were sacrificed to Zeus. The ashes were never cleared away but mixed into a paste, with the result that every year the altar became more monumental.

By the sixth century the Games had taken their final form of nine events, among them running and chariot races, boxing, wrestling, and a pentathlon. The contestants would assemble at Elis, the city which managed the Games, a month before



Key: 1 River Kladeos 2 Xystos 3 Gateway 4 Palaistra 5 Heroon 6 Bath-buildings 7 Courtyard house 8 Residential house 9 'Workshop of Pheidias' 10 Leonidaion 11 Club-house 12 Processional entrance 13 Wall 14 Bouleuterion 15 Temple of Zeus 16 House of Nero 17 Roman baths 18 Doric colonnade 19 Honoric monument 20 Secret entrance 21 Stadium 22 Altar 23 Umpires' stand 24 Bases 25 Terrace 26 Treasuries 27 Metroon 28 Nymphaion 29 Temple of Hera 30 Precinct of Pelops 31 Philippeion 32 Prytaneion

FIG. 3 Plan of Olympia. The site of Olympia was primarily a sanctuary to Zeus, whose temple dominated the central enclosure. As a sanctuary open to all Greeks, cities also contributed their own buildings and kept their own treasuries on the site. The site became impossibly crowded during the games.

they were due to start, and then, two days before the first races, a procession would set out for the sanctuary with officials leading the athletes, horses, and chariots. The Games would last for five days and were attended by vast crowds. The custom of running naked was already well established, nudity being the 'costume' of heroic identity. The events were interwoven with contests for heralds and trumpeters, speeches by well-known orators, banquets, sacrifices, and finally, on the last day, a great procession of the victors to the Temple of Zeus where they were given their wreaths of wild olive and showered with leaves and flowers. (The last Games were held in AD 395 but the site had become forgotten after earthquakes changed the flow of the river Alpheus and allowed it to be buried in silt. Much of the site of Olympia has been excavated since its discovery in 1766.)

In the sixth century the Olympic Games were joined by the Pythian Games at Delphi (in 582), in 581 by the Isthmian Games, and by the Nemean Games at Nemea in the Argolis in 573. Each year there were now one or two major festivals. However, they were, in effect, only open to those with the leisure to train for them. This preserved them for the aristocracy. The prizes were, as at Olympia, always modest—a pine crown at the Isthmian Games, a crown of wild celery at the Nemean. A victor might erect his statue at the games and hundreds of these statues still remained at Olympia when the site was visited by the Greek traveller Pausanias in the second century AD.

Among the poets of this world is Pindar (518–438 BC), a Theban aristocrat whose complex but exquisite songs were commissioned by aristocratic victors from throughout the Greek world. Pindar believed the good breeding of the aristocrat made him naturally superior, while victory in the games elevated him further, close to the gods and heroes of the past. His achievements shone with the radiance and magic of gold: 'Gold shines out like a blazing fire in the night beyond any proud wealth: and, if you wish to sing of prizes, seek no other bright star that is hotter in the day than the sun in the golden sky, nor shall we name a contest better than Olympia.' (Olympian I; translation: Ewen Bowie.) In her *The Traffic in Praise: Pindar and the Poetics of Social Economy* (Ithaca, NY, 1991), Leslie Kurke has shown how success in the games transferred itself into status in the city where victors would even be incorporated unarmed into the line of battle as if they had become talismans of their city's invincibility. In 416 the Athenian aristocrat Alcibiades entered no less than seven chariot teams in the Olympics (this was the only event in which one could use others, here charioteers, as competitors) and then unscrupulously used his success to manipulate the city's democratic assembly. 'There was a time', he told his credulous audience, 'when the Greeks imagined that our city had been ruined by the war, but they came to consider it even greater than it really is because of the splendid show I made as its representative at the Olympic Games, when I entered seven chariots for the chariot race and took the first, second, and fourth places... It is customary for such things to bring honour, and the fact that they are done at all must give an impression of power.'

Just as victory brings its divinity so does defeat its shame. In a late ode to a wrestler, Pindar records the humiliation of those defeated:

And now four times you came down with bodies beneath you
 (You meant them harm)
 To whom the Pythian feast has given
 No glad home-coming like yours.
 They, when they meet their mothers,
 Have no sweet laughter around them moving delight.
 In back streets out of their enemies' way
 They cower, disaster has bitten them.

(Translation: Maurice Bowra, the Oxford
 don famous for his love of Pindar)

Back home after the excitement of the games, the aristocracy retreated into the private world of the *symposia*, drinking parties conducted within a formal and ritualized setting. The *symposium* had its roots in the hall-feasts of the warrior chieftains, but now they were developed into occasions of dignity and ceremony. Men reclined on couches set around the walls of the dining-room. There were always odd numbers of couches, a minimum of seven, a maximum of fifteen, often with two men to a couch. One man would preside over the proceedings, mixing the wine and overseeing the transfer of the mixture to the drinking cups of the guests. The *symposium* was, in fact, the major influence on the design of pottery and its decoration. The water was fetched in a *hydria*, the wine stored in an amphora, from which it was transferred for mixing to a *krater*, and distributed to the participants via a drinking cup, a *kylix*. Although it has proved enormously difficult to generalize about the relationship between the *symposium* and the favourite scenes on pottery, there is certainly a link to scenes from the life of Dionysus, the god of wine, and to traditional mythical scenes in general.

The *symposia* provided for many pleasures—food and drink, good conversation, and sex. Here one finds a market for luxury goods, perfumes, honey, and eels as well as selected wines, notably from Mende or Thasos. There were the girls, the *hetairai*, who often had skills in dancing and music and who could provide more in companionship than the prostitute visited for immediate sexual relief. Then there were games such as *kottabos* which involved flicking the dregs of wine at a target or favoured lover. The *symposia* would normally end in music and song—the *hetairai* are often shown on pots naked playing the double pipe, the instrument associated with Dionysus and abandonment. (In contrast, the lyre was always the symbol of restraint and respectable women are often shown on pottery seated and playing one.) Finally the participants might rowdily take to the streets to complete an evening of drunken revelry.

In Greece music was interwoven with every aspect of life. Rosalind Thomas, an Oxford classicist specializing in performance culture, lists, among the many manifestations of music, 'hymns to the gods at public festivals, paeans in honour of Apollo, victory odes at the games, processional songs (*prosodia*), songs praising individuals (*encomia*), songs at funerals and marriages (*epithalamia*), maiden songs (*partheneia*), and dirges'. Typically, also, music accompanied any public performance of poetry or drama. The composing of the words was thus only part of the

poet's task. Pindar stresses that 'the garlands placed like a yoke on the hair exact payment of this sacred debt: to blend together properly the lyre with her intricate voice, and the shout of oboes, and the placing of words.' The works of Pindar were choral lyrics, those of Sappho monodic lyrics, accompanied by the lyre. Music gave an emotional tone to the spoken word that is hard to re-create today. It was one that the philosopher Plato was well aware of, and when he put his case for the regulation of poetry (based on the emotions it aroused) he included dancing and choral singing as well.

Music also formed the core of a traditional education. In Athens education was originally a form of initiation into aristocratic culture. Mastery of the lyre had its place in the formation of character. 'So also the lyre teacher,' records one source, 'sees to his pupils' restraint and good behaviour. Once they are able to play, he teaches them songs by suitable poets, stringing these into the lesson, and gets the rhythms and tunings into the boys' minds to make them less wild and better in tune for effective discourse and action' (translation: Peter Levi). Literature and physical training were taught alongside music and all three were related to physical and moral development. Physical training allowed the development of a perfect body. 'What a disgrace it is for a man to grow old without ever seeing the beauty and strength of which his body is capable,' said Socrates. Once literacy had been acquired, pupils learned poetry, particularly that of Homer, by heart, as a means of absorbing moral values.

Attendance at a *symposium* appears to have been a part of the young boy's initiation into the values of aristocratic society. As a sign of his status he was allowed to sit, but not recline, on a couch, and was expected to pour out the wine once it had been mixed. In the same period that games became an integral part of aristocratic life, another form of competition, that of older unmarried men for the sexual attentions of young boys, appears. It is recorded without inhibition or prurience on many vase paintings.

Anthropologists have found pederasty to be a feature of many traditional societies, and it is normally related to the initiation of the boy into the warrior community. In some cases semen is passed on from the older man to the boy as if the strength of the community depends on it being preserved from one generation to the next. Usually the boy is expected to be a passive partner. In Athens, however, the essence of these pederastic relationships is not easy to discern. They certainly took place within heavily circumscribed limits. The *erastes*, the suitor, approached the *eromenos*, the loved one, according to the closely defined rituals of a courtship. The boy was expected to behave chastely, to refuse any material reward, and not to submit easily to the attentions of his lover. (This is the ideal put forward in Plato's *Symposium*.) The sexual element of the relationship appears to have been restrained, and may not have involved any actual penetration of the *eromenos*. In his essay 'Law, Social Control, and Homosexuality', which deals with the control of sexuality in Athens, David Cohen suggests that the boy, who was not yet fully a male member of the community, might be being used as a substitute for women by older men who had not yet reached the age of marriage. The courtship rituals for boys and for women were, he suggests, very similar. The boy had the right to be protected from

unreasonable sexual demands and his family would be vigilant to ensure he was not being abused by his lover.

A distinction has to be made between pederasty, as described above, and homosexuality. For a Greek male to accept the submissive role in a homosexual relationship, or to be paid for this role, was considered so degrading that, in Athens at least, it resulted in the loss of citizen rights. As a surviving vase painting showing the victory of the Greeks over the Persians at the Battle of Eurymedon (early 460s) suggests, one of the rights of a victor was to inflict sexual humiliation (sodomy) on those he had defeated.

For the older man pederasty appears always to have ceased with marriage, and older lovers were simply seen as ridiculous. 'What kind of life is there,' wailed the sixth-century poet Mimnermos, conscious above all of his failing sexual powers, 'without golden Aphrodite, the goddess of love. May I die when I no longer take any interest in secret love affairs, in sweet exchanges and in bed. These are the flowers of youth, pleasant alike for men and women. But when painful old age overtakes a man and makes him ugly outside and foul-minded within, then wretched cares eat away at his heart and no longer does he rejoice to gaze upon the sun, being hateful to young men and despicable to women.' (Translation: Robert Garland.)

It was understandable that many aristocrats should hold conservative views and be reluctant to welcome the coming of democracy in a city such as Athens. Xenophon, the historian and friend of Socrates, wrote that 'the *demos* [the people] has put down the athletes at Athens and the practitioners of *mousike*'. Aristocrats adapted to democracy in different ways. Some attempted to use enduring traditions of deference, or displays of victory in the games (as with Alcibiades above), to gain influence over the Assembly; in other words they accepted the reality of political change and tried to work with it. Others put up defences of oligarchy or, in the extreme case of Plato, highly sophisticated attacks on popular involvement in government. A tradition of reasoned objection to democracy was to be an important element in Greek political philosophy. (See further p. 285 below and Josiah Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule*, Princeton and London, 1998.)

The death rate in ancient Greece, through childhood illness, death in battle, shipwreck, or disease, must have been high. There was an intense recognition of the transition from youthfulness to old age. As Mimnermos of Colophon put it in the seventh century

The ripeness of youth's fruit is short,
Short as the sunlight on the earth,
And once this season of perfection's past,
It is better to be dead than stay alive.

(Translation: M. L. West)

Even so many Greeks survived into old age. Solon claimed that a man was at the peak of his intellect and power of speech between the ages of 42 and 56. Plato lived

until he was 80 while the playwright Sophocles was still writing a year before he died aged 91. The rhetorician Gorgias, reputed to have lived to over 100, attributed his longevity to a meagre diet. (Certainly the normal Greek diet of oil, cereals, and fruit was a healthy one and modern Greeks have the highest male life expectancy in the European Community.) Some even found joy in being a grandparent. One fifth-century grave-marker commemorating a dead woman called Ampharete is inscribed, 'I am holding the dear child of my daughter, which I did when we both looked on the rays of the sun, and now that we have both passed away, I hold her still upon my knees.'

And so on towards death. For those who died young there was a desire to die nobly so that burial could take place publicly with all due honours. The Greeks cared most for their posthumous reputations, and the preservation of the body had no importance. The rituals of death were simple and moving. The body was washed and anointed in olive oil, then wrapped in two layers of cloth. A vigil was held at which songs of mourning would be sung and the body taken in procession to the cemetery. Here its final resting place was marked by a stone stele, or even a statue of the dead man for those who could afford one. (See further Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*, 2nd edition, Ithaca, NY, 2001.)

A funeral monument from the second century AD at the city of Aphrodisias honours the memory of Epicrates, son of Epicrates, and places him well within the aristocratic culture that was enduring centuries after the classical age.

This stone sings of Epicrates' son.
Epicrates, who lies under the mound
Still a youth. Now the dust [of the gymnasium] is left behind
As well as the lyre he strummed and the Homeric songs
And the spears and the round shield of willow with its fine grip
And the horse bridles now covered with cobwebs
And the bows and the javelins. Outstanding in all these things
To Hades the fair-famed youth has gone.

(Translation: Angelos Chaniotis)

There is one race of men, one race of gods, both have breath of life from a single mother [Gaia, the earth, according to legend]. But sundered power holds us divided, so that the one is nothing, while for the other the brazen sky is established as their sure citadel for ever. Yet we have some likeness, in great intelligence and strength, to the immortals, though we know not what the day may bring, what course after nightfall destiny has written that we must run to the end.

(Pindar, *Nemean Ode 6*, translation R. Buxton)

Pindar, writing as an aristocrat who eulogized the champions of the Greek athletic world, saw his subjects as coming close to the gods in their moments of victory. It is a reminder that the boundary between human and divine in the Greek world was fluid. The gods had never distanced themselves from humanity through uttering authoritative revelations. There was no central organization on earth, no ‘church’, no sacred book from which dogma could be preached, no priesthood, in the sense of a separate body of men or women who had a vocation and/or authority to interpret what was correct belief or behaviour. Yet the Greeks had a strong sense of the sacred and supernatural that pervaded their lives at many different levels. Each city had its sanctuaries where the rituals of sacrifice were performed for the health of the community. The protecting god or goddess of the city, Athena in Athens, would act for the good of all. ‘For they say that foolish decisions are typical of this city, but the gods turn up for the best whatever mistakes you make’, according to the chorus in Aristophanes’ play *The Clouds*.

Within the Greek world-picture the twelve gods of Mount Olympus take a central place. The origins of the individual gods are varied. Some are named in the Mycenaean Linear B tablets or have even earlier origins. Zeus, the father of the gods, is found in pre-Greek Indo-European cultures. Many other gods and goddesses are superficially similar to those found in the Near East. Aphrodite, the goddess of love, has her equivalents in the Sumerian Inanna and the Semitic Astarte, and probably came to Greece from the Near East via Cyprus. Apollo’s origins also appear to be non-Greek. Others may have had Greek roots but had absorbed attributes from the east. Typically, each god or goddess is a composite one, taking its final form from many different sources.

According to Herodotus, it was Homer and Hesiod, aided by the Muses, who ‘first fixed for the Greeks the genealogy of the gods, gave the gods their titles, divided among them their honours and functions and defined their images’, but the

process, like most elements of the Homeric world view, must have begun much earlier. In their final form the Olympians became a family of gods, who had a common home on their mountain, were immortal (Zeus, his sister-wife Hera, and Poseidon, god of the sea and earthquakes, might be portrayed as middle aged but no older), and who did not need human food. Zeus was, in most mythologies, assumed to be related to them all. Athena had sprung from his head, Dionysus from his thigh. Artemis, goddess of hunting, and much else, another goddess whose origins lie in the east, becomes incorporated in the family as the daughter of Zeus by Leto, with Apollo as her twin. Aphrodite is another goddess whose original birth story (see p. 140 above) is overlain by a later myth of Zeus as her father through a goddess, Dione (although Dione is also a feminine form of 'Zeus').

The formulation of the Olympian gods as an extended family defined their relationships with each other while increasing the likelihood of disagreement and conflict among them. Between them, the Olympian gods oversaw most human experiences, those of the changing weather and elements, harvests, love and sexuality (Aphrodite), craftsmanship (Hephaestus and Athena), war (the god Ares and the goddess Athena), intellectual pursuits (Apollo), and the hearth in the home (Hestia). There was no important sphere of human experience that was not provided for. At the same time the roles of the gods were never frozen. One of the achievements, and functions, of Greek myth was to provide developing story lines so that new religious needs and aspirations could always be catered for. No one cult forbade membership of another, so spiritually this was a fluid world with much scope for individuals to find their own pathways.

The gods were linked to the origins of the staples of everyday life. The Titan Prometheus gave fire to mankind, grain was the gift of Demeter, and wine that of Dionysus. Such myths were well known. They were woven into Greek literature and rhetoric, from Homer's epics, known by any educated man, to the tragic dramas of fifth-century Athens. There are many variants on the myths, and these were developed without hesitation in the service of local needs. They would act as the filters through which the public activities of most cities and communities could be explained. So the oracle at Delphi claimed its origins as the place where the god Apollo killed a serpent, the Python. The Athenians wove the story of Theseus, the founder of their democracy, into their city's history and in 476 BC his bones were 'discovered' on the island of Skyros and brought back to Athens for burial. There was a festival in Athens known as the Oschophoria where young men dressed as women in commemoration of two men who had disguised themselves among the virgins that Theseus took to sacrifice in Crete. Often the mythology was intricate. Only the most erudite would have been able to identify all the gods, giants, heroes, and events depicted on the massive frieze on the great altar of Pergamum (second century BC), now in Berlin.

The Olympians were not alone. Hesiod had portrayed an earlier divine race, the Titans, overthrown by Zeus, the son of their leader Cronos, and other gods from this lost epoch include Gaia, the earth mother, Uranus (Heaven), and Chaos (the Void). The daughters of Gaia were the Furies, who mercilessly avenged murders

within a family. There were gods of the earth, the chthonic gods (*chthonios*, 'beneath the earth'), such as Hades, god of the underworld, darker, more morbid divinities when compared with the immortals of the mountain tops and approached by very different forms of rituals and sacrifice. A god who wavered in his membership of the Olympian Pantheon was Dionysus, the god of wine and the patron of wild abandon in drink and sex. Both the drama festivals in Athens were held in his honour.

Between the gods and men were the heroes, some of them half-human and half-divine figures, others humans whose exploits had earned them special honour and whose shrines were the object of reverence. (Alexander the Great began his campaign in Persia at Troy with sacrifices to the supposed tombs of Achilles and Ajax.) One of the most prominent of the semi-divine was Heracles (the Romans Hercules). The son of Zeus, by the beautiful mortal Alcmene, the legends of his strength soon accumulated and culminated in the myth of the Twelve Labours, undertaken in expiation by Heracles after he had killed his own children. Many of them are associated with particular sites so at Nemea, in the Peloponnese, where Heracles killed a ferocious lion, there were biennial memorial games held in honour of his father Zeus. The Labours are beautifully displayed on the metopes from the temple of Zeus at Olympia. Their successful achievement earned Heracles full divinity and there are images of his ascending to Mount Olympus.

The welfare of human beings was not the predominant concern of the gods. Their own quarrels and activities usually took precedence. While they could act as protectors of the human race or their favoured cities, they could equally be actively hostile. Euripides is the playwright who exploits this contrariness most fully. In his play *The Trojan Women*, the gods actively take part in either side of the conflict. In *Hippolytus*, Hippolytus is cursed by Theseus, his father, who believes, wrongly, that Hippolytus has seduced his second wife Phaedra. The curse activates Poseidon to send a sea monster to terrorize Hippolytus' horses who drag him to his death. Many Homeric heroes die when the gods turn against them. The efforts of one god to protect a favourite mortal or city could be frustrated by another. (So in the *Iliad* Hera wears Zeus out by abandoned love-making so that she can put her plans in action behind his back.) The gods could not always control each other. In Aeschylus' *Orestia* Athena and Apollo are hard put to it to restrain the awesome power of the Furies determined on revenge on Orestes for the murder of his mother.

Yet while the Greeks never believed that the gods were preoccupied with the behaviour of the human race, there was a consensus that they would support correct behaviour and revenge bad. 'But if any man comes striding, high and mighty in all he says and does, no fear of justice, no reverence for the temples of the gods, let a rough doom strike him down... Can such a man, so desperate, still boast he can save his life from the flashing bolts of god?' as the chorus in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* puts it. There were specific virtues and vices that aroused the particular concern of the gods. *Hubris* was offensive behaviour through which one attempted to win more honour for oneself by humiliating others, treating a free person as if they were a slave (compare Xerxes' whipping of the Hellespont), or claiming divinity

for oneself. *Ate* was headstrong behaviour, often induced by the gods, indulged in with no thought of its consequences. The gods were believed to punish behaviour against parents, guests and hosts, suppliants, and the dead, with oath-breaking being the object of particular fury. On a more positive side, the gods supported *arete*, virtue, excellence, and *charis*, the giving of favours and the taking on of obligations. In Hesiod Zeus is seen as the upholder of *dike*, 'justice/righteousness', and Solon invokes Athena in support of his reforms. There was a sense that offerings made with appropriate ritual and piety deserved a return.

There were no inhibitions about portraying the gods in statues or vase paintings, although it was seen as a major breach of convention in the fourth century BC when Praxiteles sculpted a life-size statue of Aphrodite nude—a statue that then inspired thousands of other nude Aphrodites in various poses. The gods were housed in their temples, and here their statues aroused special reverence. In the ancient Athenian Erechtheum on the Acropolis, the wooden cult statue of Athena Polias was said to have fallen from heaven. The enormous creations of the sculptor Phidias, the chryselephantine statue of Athena in the Parthenon and that of Zeus in Olympia, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, were the most famous of these, applauded throughout the Greek world.

These temples were embellished with the finest sculpture and so were symbols of the pride of a city. Some, such as the Parthenon and the temples along the ridge at Agragas (Agrigento) in Sicily, were in magnificent settings, others less prominent within the city, and some altogether remote. Those lucky enough to see the limestone temple of Apollo Epikourios, Apollo as 'helper', at Bassae in the Peloponnese before it was enveloped in its protective covering will not easily forget the impact of a building isolated against dramatic mountain scenery. Temples were sometimes used as boundary markers. The city of Mantinea in the central Peloponnese, which was surrounded by other city-states, had a ring of sanctuaries on its borders.

Temples were presided over by priests and priestesses, usually, but not always, according to the sex of the deity. Priests would oversee the general good order of the sanctuary and the running of ceremonies. Some temples appointed their priests from a designated family, others only required that their family be of some status. While a priest was not expected to be an expert on religious affairs in general, priests may have been drawn to the post through their own interest in sacred things. The biographer and philosopher Plutarch was a priest at Delphi. (Specifically on priestesses, see Joan Connelly, *Portrait of a Priestess: Women and Ritual in Ancient Greece*, Princeton and London, 2009.)

While anyone could offer a private prayer when passing a sanctuary, priests often took the initiative. A celebrated example of prayer comes from the start of the *Iliad*. Chryses, priest of Apollo, seeks revenge from the god for the humiliation put on him by Agamemnon. The god's titles are recited and reminders given of the sacrifices that Chryses has offered.

Hear me, lord of the silver bow who set your power above Chryses and Killa, the sacrosanct, who are lord in strength over Tenedos, Simintheus, if ever it pleased your heart that I built your

temple, if ever it pleased you that I burnt all the rich thigh pieces of bulls, of goats, then bring to pass this wish I pray for: let your arrows make the Danaans [Greeks] pay for my tears shed.

The practice which defined the Greeks' relationships with their gods more than any other was that of sacrifice, an offering of wine, water, or a burnt offering to gods above or those divinities or heroes in the earth below. As could be expected, sacrifices were normally carried out according to strict rituals. In the case of animal sacrifices the victim would be a domesticated sheep, goat, or ox. A noisy procession led it to the altar followed by a ritual that created the impression that it met its death with joy, possibly involving the seeking of forgiveness for the act of killing animals that had been taken into the care of man. The process of slaughter followed convention: barley grains were thrown at the victim, a sacred knife was used, a few hairs were taken first from the animal's forehead before the throat was cut. Once the animal was dead it was divided and burnt. The *splanchna*, the heart, lungs, and kidneys, the sources of love and hatred, were passed round for all to taste while the lean meat provided a more substantial feast. It was only the smell of the burning that ascended upwards to the gods.

Sacrifices were incorporated within the rituals of the major festivals. At the festival of the Panathenaea, founded in the sixth century and held every year in Athens (with a Greater Panathenaea every fourth year), Athens flaunted itself before rival cities. The rituals focused on a majestic procession through the Agora up towards the Acropolis followed by the presentation of a specially woven *peplos*, the normal dress of women, for the statue of Athena Polias, Athena as protector of the city, in the Erechtheum. Details from the procession appear on the Parthenon frieze (see below, p. 258). There are horsemen and chariots and then those on foot, elders, musicians, and men with water jugs with the sacrificial oxen in front of them. Maidens carried offerings and incense burners and so the frieze runs round to the eastern façade where mythology rules. Here the founding heroes of the ten tribes of Cleisthenes stood alongside the seated Olympian gods. In the centre of the façade the *peplos* is being folded by a young girl and a man.

After the sacrifice of a hundred oxen on the Acropolis, officials of the city, the generals and participants in the procession dined in special rooms while the remaining meat was distributed among Athenian citizens according to the numbers their deme (see earlier, p. 182) had provided for the procession. Then there were games. The prizes were amphorae of olive oil, 1,400 awarded for each games, with 140 alone for the winner of the four-horse chariot race. These amphorae were highly prized; some 300 survive, many in tombs, often treasured enough to be mended rather than discarded when broken. (See Jenifer Neils (ed.), *Goddess and Polis: The Panathenaic Festival in Ancient Athens*, Princeton and London, 1992, for details of this famous festival. For Athenian religion in general see Robert Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens*, New York and Oxford, 2007.)

As was customary with sacrificed meat, the gods were left with what appeared to be the remnants, the thighbones, and tail. A myth explains this. It told how Prometheus had made the first sacrifice but tried to deceive Zeus by concealing the

best meat in entrails and the more revolting parts of the animal and offering Zeus just the bones concealed in fat. Zeus was not taken in. He took the bones but caused Hephaestus to create a woman, Pandora, who brought to earth with her a storage jar (*pithos*). She was forbidden to open it but when her curiosity got the better of her, she released all manner of evils and diseases from which the human race had hitherto been immune. Only Hope remained at the bottom of the jar. From then on sacrificers could keep their meat but suffer a life of toil in return.

The most widespread festival of all in the Greek world was the Thesmophoria, originally held in honour of Demeter, the goddess of crops and the fertility of animals. Most festivals had their roots in the countryside and were closely connected with the rhythms of the agricultural year. The harvest was rejoiced in, all the more because its successful gathering allowed a period of leisure. The city could create or develop a festival to celebrate its own identity. In Athens the festival known as Apaturia was marked by a gathering of the phratries (see earlier, p. 181), the admission to them of new-born infants, and the introduction of boys who had reached the age of 16. This was the festival as a celebration of a rite of passage. The festivals of Dionysus or the Thesmophoria appear concerned with the overturning of conventions through drunkenness, sexual abandon, or the reversal of the subordinate roles of women. It was as if, when rebellion was sanctioned within defined limits and times, it made it all the more controllable for the rest of the year.

The most solemn festival of the Athenian year, after 464, was the annual burial of the war dead. The cremated bones of those whose bodies had been recovered were carried through the streets in procession, while an empty bier commemorated those lost abroad. In a speech made probably on behalf of those who died fighting on Samos in 439 BC, Pericles compared the loss of young life with 'the spring being taken from the year'. This was the day when the city reflected on its achievements and consolidated its own pride in being the leading city of Greece. Pericles' oration at the festival in 431 (see p. 268) is the greatest of all celebrations of Athens's achievement.

If the intentions of the gods were always uncertain, it made sense to use an oracle to test out whether a planned action was likely to bring retribution. The oracle's response might not provide a clear answer, but at least a neutral or positive answer could reassure or bring confidence. Many enterprises must have been brought to success largely through the belief that the gods favoured them.

The oracle of Apollo at Delphi, where the god had overthrown the Python, is the most celebrated example. The sanctuary was believed to be the centre of the world. It stood high on the mountain of Parnassus overlooking the gulf of Corinth. Suppliants, who came from all over the Greek world and beyond, made their way up the mountainside from the sea. (The modern road deprives the visitor of the sense of the height and remoteness of the site. It is worth walking down the mountainside on the path from the modern village to be able to look back up at the sanctuary and catch some sense of its isolated splendour.) The messages of Apollo were interpreted and relayed to supplicants by a priestess, the Pythia, who sat on a tripod above the hole in an inner sanctum of Apollo's temple on the site. Above the clutter of the complex was a stadium where the Pythian Games were held every four years.

Delphi was under the control of no single city but an association of states of central Greece and the northern Peloponnese.

Approaching an oracle was a serious business requiring sacrifices and signs from the god that the enquirer was welcome. The questions brought by suppliants were many and varied. According to Plutarch, 'people ask if they shall be victorious, if they shall marry, if it is to their advantage to sail, to farm, to go abroad.' Would-be colonizers sought advice on the best sites. Cities would ask for guidance on political problems, how to deal with disputes with neighbouring cities, or what would happen if they went to war. The answers given were not just gibberish. They were spoken as full sentences or in verse but often they needed interpretation. This could be given in the first instance by professionals within the sanctuary but their solutions could be disregarded. Themistocles famously manipulated Delphi's advice on the Persian invasion to support his plan of counter-attack. Often misinterpretation was disastrous, as the Spartans found when what they believed was an oracle promising victory against the city of Tegea, proved, in fact, to be predicting their defeat. For those on whom favour had been bestowed, especially through military victory, would donate a treasury or a shrine of their heroes to flaunt their success to their fellow Greeks.

The shrines of the healing god Asclepius also drew in hopeful supplicants from throughout the Greek world. Asclepius was a son of Apollo who had been taught the healing arts by Chiron, a wise centaur, after he had been snatched from his mother's womb. He was seen as an approachable god and those who sought his help would bed down in a sacred area (the *adyton*) close to his temple after they had carried out the customary sacrifices. He would then often appear in a dream to give advice. The most prestigious shrines were on the island of Kos and at Epidaurus in the eastern Peloponnese which became a focus for social gatherings as well. The theatre at Epidaurus is the best preserved in Greece and there is an athletics track and rooms for dining and philosophical debate. The messages of the god were supplemented by the prescription of local herbs, and surgical instruments have also been found on the site, suggesting that medical care went beyond simply invoking the god.

For those who were searching a more intense spiritual experience there were mystery cults, notable among them the Eleusinian Mysteries. The myth told how Persephone had been taken by Hades into the Underworld but was allowed to return to her mother, Demeter, the goddess of fertility, in a symbolic rebirth of the year's crops. The cult was celebrated each September at Eleusis, near Athens, in the mystery rituals. Initiation of new adherents took place through ceremonies within a Hall of Mysteries, in essence a temple, built on a site held sacred for well over a thousand years. While Athens controlled the cult and the ceremonies began with a procession from Athens, initiation was open to outsiders, even to Greek-speaking slaves. Legends told how Heracles had been among the earliest. In the centuries to come, initiation became a status symbol among Romans.

The Greeks did not live in dread of wrath of the gods. They did not assume there to be any restrictions on their right as individuals to find *eudaimonia*, the flourishing

of their rational minds, and they ridiculed those who became too religious. Plutarch, a priest himself, considered it demeaning when a visitor to a shrine indulged in ‘magic charms and spells, rushing about and beating of drums, impure purifications and unclean sanctifications, barbarous and outlandish penances and mortifications at the shrines’. Euripides had warned in his play *The Bacchae* of the fateful consequences of religious ecstasy—it distorts perceptions of reality and can lead to mindless violence. Some, the Sophists among them (see below, p. 270), were more questioning. When the philosopher Protagoras of Abdera (c.490–420) was asked his opinion on the gods, he replied that ‘I have no means of knowing whether they exist or do not exist, or what they are like in form.’ The problem, he went on, was too obscure and time too short to solve it. Protagoras does not, of course, say that the gods do not exist, but he does show a healthy acceptance of the difficulties in saying much about them. In this he is typical of the rationalists of his time. By the end of the sixth century there is, for the first time, open acceptance that the myths are often absurd. The philosopher Xenophanes (c.570–475) complained that ‘Homer and Hesiod have attributed to the gods everything that is a shame and reproach among mortals: stealing, committing adultery and deceiving each other.’ Famously Xenophanes noted that each culture fashioned gods that reflected its own experience (see earlier, p. 199).

Very few in the Greek world would have dared behave as if the gods did not exist or that there was not some form of divine supervision of city life. Plato spoke for the conventional view in his late work *The Laws*: ‘To engage in sacrifice and commune with the gods continually, by prayers and offerings and devotions of every kind, is a thing most noble and good and helpful towards the happy life, and superlatively fitting also for the good person.’ The Greeks lived easily with the sacred even if they did not always believe that the gods looked benignly upon them.

INTERLUDE 3

‘After this all becomes possible’

Creating Classical Art, 500–460 BC

The most influential art historian of the eighteenth century was Johann Winckelmann (1717–68). Winckelmann was born in Prussia, the son of a cobbler. Coming to the study of ancient Greece as a young man through reading Homer he embarked on an academic career and by the age of 31 was the librarian of an aristocratic library in Dresden. Here he wrote his first essay on Greek art, *Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks* (1755). Then, having converted to Catholicism, he went to Rome and finally became librarian at the Vatican. In his most celebrated work, *A History of the Art of Antiquity* (1764), he developed his theory of the relationship between art and history. He took it for granted that Greek art was supreme. ‘In the masterpieces of Greek art, connoisseurs and imitators find not only nature at its most beautiful but also something beyond nature, namely certain ideal forms of its beauty.’ (Note the influence here of Plato. See also Alex Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History*, New Haven and London, 1994.)

However, for Winckelmann Greek art was not static, it had its own rise to greatness and its own fall. The rise began with the Archaic period and reached its height (‘sublimity’ in Winckelmann’s terminology) in the Classical age, the fifth century BC. The essence of ‘sublime’ art was ‘noble simplicity and calm grandeur’. So the art of the Classical period (conventionally 479–323 BC) was elevated onto a pedestal and remained for many the standard by which other periods of art were judged until well into the twentieth century.

Insofar as there are changes in style from the sixth to the fifth century, from Archaic to what is known as Classical, they can be seen above all in its sculpture (for pottery see p. 191). The most common expression of sculpture in the Archaic age were the *kouroi*, the stiff and formal male figures erected over a grave or as an offering to the gods (see p. 189). As has been seen the influence of Egypt on the pose was obvious and their bodies are not carved as if they were real mortals observed in the flesh. During the sixth century there were signs of a more natural pose developing, but it was not until the early fifth century that a revolution in sculpture takes place. The transition is usually symbolized by the ‘Critian boy’, a marble statue found on the Athenian Acropolis and attributed to Critius, a sculptor active in Athens around 490–460 BC. It is dated by experts to just before 480 BC and represents one Callias, a victor in the boys’ foot race in the Panathenaic festival. The changes from the traditional *kouros* are slight, but the boy is standing as a boy might actually

stand, the right leg forward of the left which bears the weight of the body so that the right can relax slightly, not how artistic convention decrees a hero should pose. Yet this naturalness is achieved without the loss of an idealization of the human body. Here is, in the words of the art historian Kenneth Clark, ‘the first beautiful nude in art’. As John Boardman, the authority on Greek art, puts it: ‘This is a vital novelty in the history of ancient art—life deliberately observed, understood and copied. After this all becomes possible.’

There are a few clues as to why this revolution in art, from the stylized to the observed, took place. One is that bronze was becoming the most popular medium in which statues were being created. The technical problems involved in casting and assembling bronze statues had been solved by the end of the sixth century as the earliest examples show (see above, p. 190). From now on bronze predominated in Greek sculpture, but as almost every statue ended in the melting pot it is hard to guess this today. The few bronzes to survive (the Riace warriors, the Delphi charioteer, and the majestic Zeus found in a shipwreck off Cape Artemisium foremost among them) simply highlight what has been lost in quantity and quality. Bronze allowed far greater flexibility in modelling—the process of building up a figure as in bronze is totally different from cutting into marble. As a wonderful exhibition at the Royal Academy in London in 2012, *Bronze*, also showed, bronze can be burnished to produce a wide variety of aesthetic effects that pure white marble lacks.

The revolution also suggests a preoccupation with human form. While before the artist was focused on those few human beings who had become heroes, he now seems concerned with the physical beauty of human beings as an end in itself. It is hard not to see the Riace warriors without being aware of their intense sensuality. Yet within a few years this sensuality fades and is replaced by a greater concentration on the nature of the human body as an ideal. It was the sculptor Polykleitos, probably a native of Argos working from the fifth into the fourth century BC, who allied aesthetics with mathematics when he suggested that the perfect human body was perfect precisely because it reflected ideal mathematical proportions that were capable of being discovered. One of his statues, the Doryphoros, or ‘spear bearer’ (originally in bronze, but now known only through Roman copies in marble), was supposed to represent this ideal. If this approach was followed to its extreme, all statues would have had the same, perfect, proportions, but the Greeks could not close their eyes to the variety of human experience. There always remained a tension in the art of the period between the abstract ideal of the human body and a particular body copied by the artist. This may be one reason for its aesthetic appeal.

Winckelmann claimed that the ‘sublimity’ of Classical art was the result of the atmosphere of liberty and exuberance that followed the Persian Wars. So the moderation and self-control of the Critian boy reflects the self-confidence of a city that knows it has achieved greatness. Democracy has been achieved, the Persians defeated at Marathon and seen off again in 479.

Yet it pays to be cautious. It is all too easy to read into the expression of a work of art what one hopes to see there. Nevertheless there is the sense of a change of

atmosphere, the readiness to reproduce what can be observed because it is worth observing, rather than relying on conventions adopted from elsewhere. This may be no more than the experience of working in bronze but it could reflect an elevation of man, as ‘the measure of all things’ (as the fifth-century philosopher Protagoras put it) in line with the many other intellectual developments of the age.

The transition to an art rooted in observation can also be seen in temple sculpture. While an individual statue might continue to be the offering of a private patron (victors at games were a particularly popular subject), the temples provided settings for publicly financed sculpture. In particular, the pediment of a temple, with its wide centre and narrow corners, offered a space that called for special compositional expertise. The first and crudest attempts to fill a pediment, in the sixth century, involved placing a large central sculpture (for instance, on the temple of Artemis at Corcyra, 580 BC, a Gorgon’s head), flanked by unrelated scenes to fill in the space. Gradually greater order was brought into pediment design, and by the end of the sixth century the temple of Aphaea on the island of Aegina has a single scene, from the Trojan War, on its western pediment.

The new mood in Classical sculpture, seen in statuary with the ‘Critian boy’, is found on the reliefs made for the pediments of the great temple to Zeus which dominated the sanctuary at Olympia and which was built in the first half of the fifth century. In its new display in the museum at Olympia it is one of the most powerful expressions of Greek art. On the east pediment, a chariot race is about to begin. Zeus presides over it. The contest is between Oinomaos, king of Pisa, and Pelops, who will win the hand of Oinomaos’ daughter, Hippodamia, if he triumphs. The divine horses of Oinomaos make him favourite to win but, as the onlooker will know, Pelops has fixed the race by replacing the axles of Oinomaos’ chariot with beeswax and Oinomaos will be killed. Pelops is cursed for his trickery and the curse brings the suicide of Hippodamia and endless misfortunes to his descendants, ‘the house’ of their son Atreus that includes the ill-fated Agamemnon. The myth of Pelops is portrayed here because, by tradition, Pelops was buried at Olympia. (For Aeschylus’ treatment of the curse, see *The Oresteia*, p. 275 below.)

It is not only that the poses of the figures are more natural than those of their stiffer Archaic forebears, but the characters exude a sense of feeling and awareness. They know what is about to unfold. The sculptures are all the more moving because of the relative simplicity of the figures and the designs in which they are set. The ‘seer’ on the east pediment is the example most often picked out to make the point. On the west pediment Apollo watches over a tumultuous conflict between Centaurs and Lapiths. Here order presides over disorder, Apollo’s face has transcended the tumult around him. The sculptures may have originated from Athens and the stage is set for a further development towards the finest and most majestic temple sculptures of all, those of the Parthenon (see p. 258).

Classical art cannot be removed from the wider political, religious, and social contexts within which it is presented. Cities were showing off their achievements both at home and at the Panhellenic shrines. They had heroes to display, victories to celebrate, statements to make to their fellow Greeks, all of which could be done

through monumental art. The difficulty lies in pinpointing what more they wanted to say about the figures they created, what kinds of statement about humankind are being made. Are they flaunting their confidence as victors, as with the Riace warriors, possibly made to celebrate the victory of Marathon and displayed with typical Athenian arrogance at Delphi or Olympia, or are they being deliberately erotic, as in the sensuous figure of Nike concealed under drapery from the Temple of Nike in Athens? (This is one suggestion made by Andrew Stewart in his *Classical Greece and the Birth of Western Art*, Cambridge and New York, 2008, a study that places monumental art within the wider cultural context of the fifth century. See also Richard Neer, *The Emergence of the Classical Style in Greek Sculpture*, Chicago and London, 2010, for a well-received recent assessment. Neer argues that Classical art is an intensification of Archaic styles rather than a revolutionary development in itself.)

The Delian League

Athens had a ravaged look now that the sixth century temples and statues on the Acropolis had been burned or destroyed by the Persians. The ruins were left untouched for over thirty years in memory of the desecration. Much of the Archaic sculpture was incorporated into new defensive walls, although the most ancient site of all, the temple of Athena Polias (Athena as ‘goddess of the city’), was cleared so that sacrifices could resume. Yet, despite the devastation, the Greeks were triumphant, and Athens, with her forces intact and brimming with confidence of victory and desire for revenge, was ready to continue the war with Persia. (For the background to this chapter see the essays in Loren J. Samons III (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Pericles*, Cambridge and New York, 2007, and Christian Meier, *Athens: A Portrait of the City in the Golden Age*, London, 1998. James Davidson’s *Courtesans and Fishcakes*, London, 1997, is a lively survey of Athenian society.)

Yet in 479 the triumph still remained incomplete. The expansion of the Persian empire had been thwarted for a second time but the empire was intact and resilient and the Greeks, sheltering in their city-states, were still vulnerable. Those smaller communities in the Aegean and along the west coast of Asia Minor looked for a protector. Sparta’s crucial role in the final Battle of Plataea gave her the chance but her traditional clumsiness in handling others soon alienated the other Greeks. It was, therefore, by mutual agreement that Athens set up a system of alliances, a league, in which the member states would have ‘the same friends and enemies’. Athens played on the common Ionian ancestry of most of her dependants. The league treasury was on the central Aegean island of Delos, sacred to Apollo, and a spiritual focus for Ionians, and the Delian League, as it was later known, was planned to be an alliance of equal members, each contributing ships or money according to their size.

Athens’s predominance in the League was inevitable. She had 180 triremes in 480 and 300 by 431, each manned by 200 fit oarsmen. In contrast Sparta (never a member of the League) had no navy at all, and few maritime members of the League could provide the 400 men needed to man even two triremes. Athens proved opportunistic, even ruthless, in expanding her influence. The historian Thucydides, whose account of the League’s early activities is the only one to have survived,

suggests her motives were ones of self-interest. The desire for revenge and reparations from Persia was no more than a pretext (*proskhema*), he tells us, for gaining control of the alliance. (The work of Thucydides is dealt with in detail in Chapter 18.) Certainly Athens had powerful economic reasons for maintaining a presence in the Aegean. While she may not have been as dependent on grain imports from the Black Sea as was once thought (the dependency only became acute towards the end of this century), recent research suggests that she favoured this grain for its quality. The north-western coast of the Aegean with its silver mines in Thrace and its rich timber was also attractive to a city which relied so heavily on building and maintaining ships. There was a major challenge in 476 when Naxos, the largest island in the Cyclades, tried to break free of the alliance. Athens crushed her, 'enslaved her contrary to what was established', according to Thucydides, and insisted that she would now have to pay her tribute in gold rather than in providing ships. A few years later the island of Thasos in the northern Aegean was besieged by Athenians after a trading dispute over a gold mine, its walls pulled down, its navy surrendered, and an annual tribute demanded in its place.

The commander of the League's forces was Cimon, the aristocratic son of the Miltiades who had launched the Athenian attack at Marathon. His policy appears to have been to use the threat of Persia to mould and maintain the unity of the League, while at the same time keeping good relations with Sparta so that Athens could maintain her forward policy in the Aegean without any threats from the Peloponnese. His first campaign was to Eion at the mouth of the river Strymon in Thrace, where a Persian garrison still held out. Then the Athenians attacked Carystus on the tip of Euboea, a city that had gone over to the Persians in the war. Cimon's most resounding success was against a Persian (in fact, largely Phoenician) fleet at the river Eurymedon, some time between 469 and 466. The enemy fleet was completely destroyed and Persia left without any offensive forces in the Aegean. A further campaign by Cimon is recorded against Persians and Thracians in the Chersonese, possibly about 468. Athens appears to have used these campaigns to her own advantage. There were rich timber resources to be exploited around Eion, and there is one account of an Athenian force trying to fight its way inland after the city had been captured. When the island of Scyros was cleared of pirates Athenians remained to settle around its fine harbour.

The Resurgence of Aristocratic Influence

Solon had broken the stranglehold of the hereditary aristocracy of Athens and established a state in which, in theory at least, citizens were equal before the law. Cleisthenes' newly created tribes provided members for the Boule, the council which had the role of drawing up the business to be set before the Assembly. However, the power of this Assembly was still restricted by the Areopagus, a council made up of former archons (magistrates) who were drawn largely from the aristocracy. There were now also the ten generals, the *strategoi*, introduced in 501

and elected by the citizen body. Their status was enhanced by the Persian Wars, and generalship, which, unlike other offices, could be held from year to year, now became the goal of any ambitious politician. The generals, too, tended to be drawn from the richer classes and so, in the early part of the fifth century, Athens remained under strong aristocratic influence.

Aristocratic patronage was not confined to the privacy of the *symposia*. Leading Athenian families glorified their city's name by providing fine buildings both at home and abroad. The distinguished family of the Alcmaeonidae rebuilt a temple to Apollo in Delphi in marble, while in Athens itself Cimon was an important patron of the city. Cimon identified himself with the hero Theseus by bringing back his bones to Athens to be housed in the Theseion in the centre of the city. The Stoa Poikile, a colonnade filled with paintings of Athens's military successes by the celebrated Polygnotus of Thasos, was the gift probably of Cimon's brother-in-law. (Its foundations were discovered as recently as 1981.)

Even though aristocratic forces remained influential in the city, there were bubbling popular pressures. The records survive of the annual ostracism, the right of citizens to vote, by writing on a shard of pottery, the name of any citizen they wanted exiled. The exile lasted for ten years. Numerous *ostraka* survive and the names of virtually every aristocratic leader, including Cimon, can be found on them. Piecing the evidence together, it can be seen that anyone adopting a soft line towards Persia was soon unpopular.

There was another new force at work. The rowers who had triumphed at Salamis were largely drawn from the poorest of the citizen class, the *thetes*. Tribute and the silver from the Attic mines kept the navy financed with hundreds of men, cooped up and sweating below decks as they learned to manoeuvre the cumbersome triremes. It can be assumed that the *thetes* now recognized their potential political strength. (Aristotle acknowledged this link when he wrote that the Athenian leader Pericles, see below, later 'turned the state towards naval power, with the result that the masses had the courage to take more into their own hands in all fields of government'.)

It is not surprising, therefore, that Themistocles, founder of the navy, was closely linked to the move towards greater democratic rights but the aristocracy may have attempted to force a campaign of ostracism against him. On *ostraka* dating from the 480s and 470s no name appears more frequently than 'Themistocles', but a chance find of 170 *ostraka* all with his name on but written in only fourteen different hands suggests that voters, perhaps illiterate, were simply being handed out the shards. The campaign succeeded. Themistocles was finally removed from the city in 471 after a trumped-up charge of his being pro-Persian had been upheld by the Areopagus.

The Democratic Revolution

Ten years later, in 461, the democratic party had its chance of revenge. In 464 Sparta had suffered a devastating earthquake that was followed by a helot revolt. Cimon, determined to maintain good relations with Sparta, arrived in the Peloponnese

with some 4,000 hoplites to offer help. Something went drastically wrong. It seems that the Spartans feared the Athenians might actually support the helots and sent them home. It was a massive humiliation. In Athens itself a radical orator Ephialtes, of whom almost nothing is known, whipped up feeling against Cimon, aristocrats in general, and the policy of offering aid to Sparta. When Cimon arrived home, he was the one who was ostracized. This was a turning point. The relationship with Sparta was broken—and the seeds were sown for the great conflict that was to break out between the cities thirty years later, in 431.

Ephialtes was determined to go further and shift power in Athens more decisively away from the aristocrats and towards the mass of citizens. He put about a myth that Athens had originally enjoyed a democracy but that this had been subverted by the growth of aristocratic power. Now democracy had to be regained. Ephialtes' target was the Areopagus, the ancient council that supervised the constitution. He accused some of its members of corruption and managed to get it stripped of most of its powers. Its traditional role of impeaching citizens accused of treason against the state was then transferred to the Assembly, the popular juries, and the Boule. (One power it retained for centuries was the right to assess new cults that were being introduced into the city and so 500 years later the apostle Paul had to come before the Areopagus to argue, without success, for the toleration of his faith.) Yet now power had passed to the Assembly and most business of the city was decided through a majority vote with the Boule running the day-to-day administration when the Assembly was not sitting.

Ephialtes did not live to see his achievement. He died violently, probably at the hands of disgruntled oligarchs, and room was left for one of the most remarkable men in Athenian history to emerge as the leader of democratic Athens. Pericles came from a wealthy and aristocratic family—he was rich enough to finance the production of Aeschylus' play *The Persians*, which glorified the defeat of the Persians, when still in his early twenties. Quite what made him a radical is hard to know. There were certainly personal rivalries involved: in 463 Pericles led a prosecution case against Cimon, twenty years his senior. On his mother's side, his great-uncle was the democratic Cleisthenes so he had a tradition to follow here. His mother's clan, the Alcmaeonids, had been cursed as outsiders in the seventh century and so perhaps a sense of isolation from mainstream society lingered. We know too that in his youth he was influenced by the philosopher Anaxagoras of Clazomenae, a visitor to Athens from Asia Minor, although it is not known how far the experience radicalized him. Wherever the impulses came from, Pericles simply appears to have believed that power could be shifted further to the people.

The year 461 gave Pericles his chance. He was now in his mid-thirties and already a *strategos*, one of the ten generals. This gave him the opportunity to move into the power vacuum left by the death of Ephialtes. The challenge was how to manipulate to his advantage the volatile Assembly that was all too conscious of its new powers. (Donald Kagan, *Pericles of Athens and the Birth of Democracy*, New York, 1991, explores the many roles played by Pericles during his years of power.)

Democracy in Practice

It was in the 450s that the new structure of Athenian democracy was consolidated. The Assembly could now make laws on any subject, raise taxes, supervise their spending, and conduct all aspects of foreign policy. It met at regular intervals, four times in each of the ten months of the year. The first meeting of each month had a fixed agenda that included reports on the state of the grain supply and issues of national defence. Extra meetings could be called in emergencies. As only male citizens, over 18, could attend, women, children, foreigners, and, of course, slaves were excluded, and in this sense the Assembly was an elitist power house. Nevertheless, as many as 30,000 citizens were eligible to attend, although the Assembly's meeting place, the Pnyx, a hill to the west of the city, probably only had room for about 6,000 until it was enlarged in about 400 BC (after which 8,000 might have been squeezed in). In practice those who lived far out in the countryside and had land to work would have found it difficult to attend.

Once the formal rituals of opening had been concluded the President of the Assembly would ask, 'Who wishes to address the Assembly?' In principle anyone could now stand up, although naturally, when the moment came, it would only be a few who would have the courage to do so. Business was conducted by majority vote (in effect a show of hands) after listening to speeches. This, and appropriate applause and heckling, must have been the limit to most citizens' participation. There were no political parties and although leaders must have the backing of close friends they had no reliable majority and no way of organizing continuing support.

Pericles was a superb speaker. He needed to be, no one was safe from the rowdy crowd. Athens's most famous orator, Demosthenes (384–22), would be howled down when he made his first attempts to address the Assembly, and debates during the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC) often got completely out of hand with decisions made on the spur of the moment that were soon regretted. The tone was quieter in Pericles' day but the rhetorical skills needed if a speaker was to be listened to were considerable. Often described by his critics as aloof, Pericles came alive before an audience. His speeches were eloquent and meticulously prepared. An early success in arranging payments for the sailors and members of juries must have earned him a groundswell of popular support.

Although little is known of his achievements in the 450s, Pericles gradually extended his influence. The historian Thucydides, an admirer, told how at first he had been 'submissive to the people, ready to obey and give in to the desires of the masses as a steersman yields to the winds' but, as his confidence grew, he was much tougher, even to the extent of getting angry and forcing the people to do his will. 'He was never compelled to flatter the people, but, on the contrary enjoyed so high an estimation that he could afford to anger them by contradiction,' as Thucydides put it. When there were disasters for his city he had a knack of presenting them as victories. Overall he responded with good humour to the attacks on him, the lampoons that mocked the shape of his head. He was especially abused for his

relationship with Aspasia, a free-speaking and highly intelligent woman from Mile-tus who became his consort after his divorce.

Yet despite the many provocations, Pericles never attempted to subvert the democratic system he had created, or abuse his power, except in the one case where he made his son by Aspasia a citizen despite the law he had introduced himself that both parents of a child must be citizens to pass on citizenship. He could do nothing to save the great sculptor Pheidias from imprisonment when the latter was accused of embezzling gold from his statue of Athena. Nor could he prevent a motion, probably made at the same time as the accusation against Pheidias, that he too was involved in financial misbehaviour, although he seems to have fought it off. However, it was just this refusal to subvert the system that allowed Athenian democracy in all its raucous glory to survive not only through Pericles' lifetime but through the much more tumultuous years of the Peloponnesian War. This was his most important legacy.

Between the meetings of the Assembly there had to be continuity of government, and this was provided by the Boule, the Council of Five Hundred. Each of the ten tribes put forward volunteers, and fifty of these were selected by lot to make the total of 500. Each served for a year and could only serve twice in total (and then not in consecutive years). The Boule met most days of the year in its own council house. There is some evidence that membership was biased towards richer and more influential citizens, presumably because they could support themselves.

The duty of the Boule was to oversee the running of the state, and, in particular, to prepare business for the Assembly and then ensure that its decisions were carried out. No issue could be raised in the Assembly if it had not first been discussed by the Boule. When news reached Athens in 339 that Philip of Macedon was advancing into Greece, the citizens rushed to the Assembly but had to wait there until the Boule had deliberated first. It has been argued that the Boule acted as a restraining force on the Assembly through the way it chose business and framed motions, though its continually changing membership would have militated against it achieving any sustained influence. In between meetings of the Boule the fifty members from each tribe took it in turn to stay on permanent call. They were put up at state expense in their circular meeting house, the Tholos, which stood alongside the main council house in the Agora. (The foundations of the Tholos have been found. For an excellent survey of other finds in recent excavations see John Camp, *The Archaeology of Athens*, New Haven and London, 2004.)

By the mid-century Athens was a wealthy and cosmopolitan city. Its citizens formed only a minority of a population that included large numbers of slaves (perhaps some 100,000 out of a total population of 250,000 for Attica) and several thousand foreigners (metics, from the Greek *metoikoi*, 'those who had changed homes'). Although the metics could not own land or become citizens, they were welcome for their skills and formed an important part of the city's labour resources. (Forty per cent of those working on the Parthenon were metics.) In 451, in a law attributed to Pericles, eligibility for citizenship was narrowed by making it a requirement that only those born to parents who were both citizens could acquire

citizenship themselves. So the fruits of citizenship were channelled towards a smaller, more select group, perhaps a response of the democrats to the aristocratic custom of seeking wives from abroad. (Ironically, as already mentioned, Pericles managed to make an exception for his son, also Pericles, by his mistress Aspasia, who was given citizenship by a special decree after Pericles' legitimate sons had died.)

The complexity of the city's affairs can be gathered from the fact that there were no less than 600 administrative posts to be filled each year. All, with the exception of the ten generals, were chosen by lot from those citizens aged 30 or more who had good credentials. In the case of the generals, where proven ability was essential, election was by simple majority in the Assembly and repeatable—Pericles was re-elected general every year from 443. The ten generals exercised collective control over military affairs but a named general might be appointed to lead a specific campaign. Other posts included the nine archons (originally the chief magistrates of the city and still responsible between them for festivals, the religious life of the city, and the administration of justice), financial officials, guardians of the prisons, and, at the bottom of the scale, those responsible for cleaning the streets. All these posts eventually became paid ones.

Once selected, officials were examined before they took office and then, standing on a stone slab, had to take an oath. (The slab was rediscovered as recently as 1970.) At the end of their year all officials had to hand in accounts to be scrutinized by a committee of the Boule, but any citizen could bring a complaint against any official at any time. Pericles' son, who turned out to be hostile to his father's achievements, complained that this right only encouraged antagonism:

They [the Athenians] are more abusive of each other and more envious among themselves than they are towards other human beings. In both public and private gatherings, they are the most quarrelsome of men; they most often bring each other to trial; and they would rather take advantage of each other than profit by cooperative aid.

However, public accountability at this level must have been essential in maintaining the standards of public service.

Those who were accused of offences had to appeal to their fellow citizens. There was no independent judiciary in Athens and the citizen body as a whole took responsibility for enforcing the law both as judge and jury. Although the Areopagus still presided over accusations of deliberate murder and of sacrilege, most cases were heard by juries of ordinary citizens. A roll of 6,000 citizens was drawn up for each year and from these a jury was selected for each case. The more serious the charge the larger was the jury, with a maximum of 2001 with smaller numbers, typically 500, the norm. It would have been impossible to bribe so many. Jury sitting was virtually a full-time job, with jurors sitting up to 200 days a year, and Pericles recognized the burden early in the 450s by introducing pay.

The law courts were not criminal courts with clearly defined laws against which the guilt of the accused was judged. Any citizen could accuse another of an 'offence' which was usually vaguely phrased, a general charge of 'impiety' being a particular

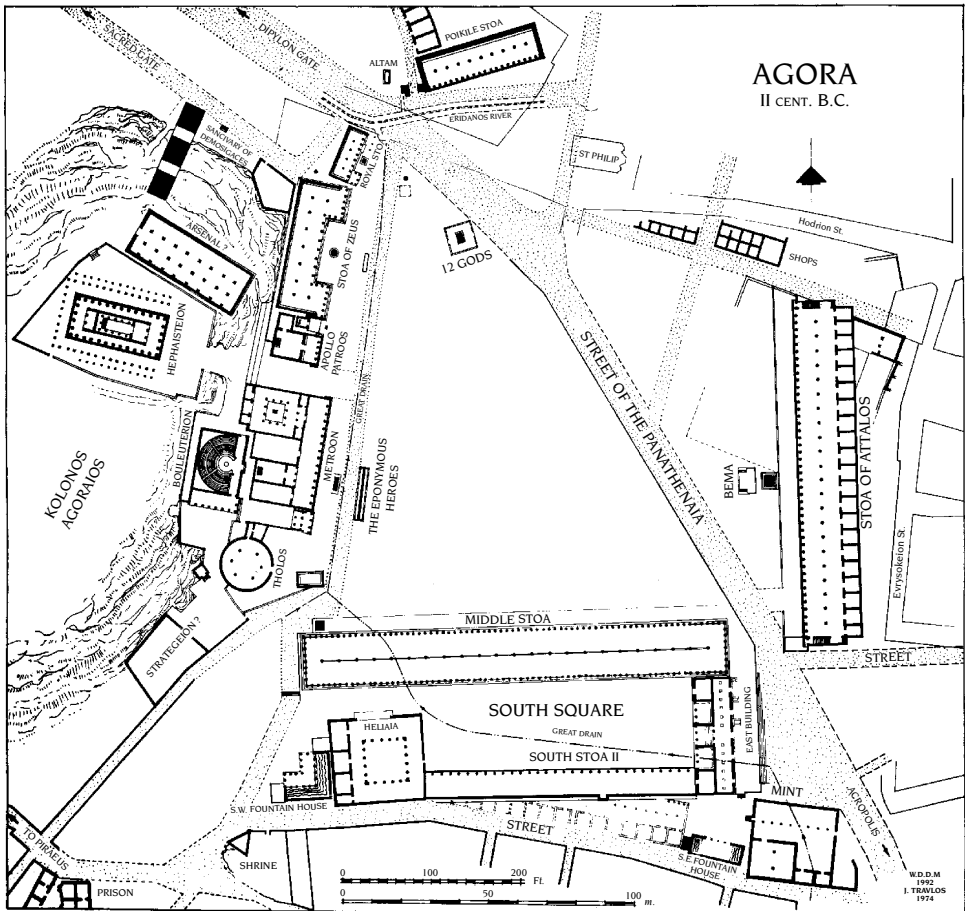


FIG. 4 The Athenian Agora. The Agora was cleared in the early sixth century and was then gradually lined with public buildings including those for officials and the council (*bouleuterion*). The larger stoas were later Hellenistic additions. The route of the Panathenaic festival, to the Acropolis, ran across the square. Note also the temple to Hephaestus on higher ground to the west.

favourite, and in fact the action was often an extension of political rivalries. The aim of the prosecutor was to denigrate his opponent by bringing in a range of accusations, especially that he had been disrespectful of the gods or failed in some way to be an effective citizen. 'Only recently he [one Timarchus] threw off his cloak in the Assembly and his body was in such an appalling and shameful condition thanks to his drunkenness and his vices that decent men had to look away,' was one typical taunt. Other accusations involved a man being the passive partner in a homosexual relationship, the son of a prostitute, or a coward in a battle. One unfortunate defendant was said not to have shown enough sorrow on the death of his daughter (a good father would have done so, and good fathers make good citizens). One can

understand why all this public throwing of dirt was so entertaining. The comic poet Aristophanes satirizes a juror who had become transfixed by his role, to the extent of sleeping in the courts and keeping a beachful of voting pebbles in his house so that he should never run short. (The speeches that survive from these cases provide excellent material on what was and what was not valued in an Athenian citizen.)

The demands of this democratic system were heavy. It has been calculated that between 5 and 6 per cent of citizens over the age of 30 would be required each year if all the posts on the Boule, the juries, and administration were to be filled. With the ban on reselection for most posts, this meant that virtually everyone was involved in administration or government at some point in their lives. Even Socrates, who attempted to avoid political life completely, served his time on the Boule, and the playwright Euripides, who was well known for lack of sociability, went on an official embassy to Syracuse. This is a society, in contrast to most democracies today, in which politics was a natural way of being human. Athenian citizens whether rowing a trireme, participating in the Assembly and law courts, or collectively enthused by tragic drama showed a civic consciousness that has had few parallels elsewhere.

The Glorification of the City in Marble

This commitment of the Athenians to their city was shown in the way they transformed it. By the 450s, the inhibition against rebuilding was weakening and there was a determination to create a city worthy of the new democracy. An important new building from this period, already noted, was the circular Tholos used as the meeting place of the Council of Fifty. It was placed next to the main meeting place of the Boule. Behind these buildings, on higher ground to the west, a temple to Hephaestus, god of fire and hence blacksmiths and craftsmen in general, rose to overlook the Agora and face the Acropolis. It remains as the best preserved of all Greek temples and reflects the growing industrial importance of the city (although Hephaestus was also honoured by Athenians as the god who cut open Zeus' head with an axe to release Athena).

The most glorious achievement of Athens in the second half of the fifth century was the rebuilding of the Acropolis. The great citadel had been the religious and defensive centre of the area since Mycenaean times. A major rebuilding programme for its main temples had been under way before the Persian attack. This was halted. Columns from the unfinished temples can be seen incorporated in the wall of the Acropolis itself, possibly as a memorial to the attack. Others were inserted in the walls built around the city by Themistocles in the 470s. (These were subsequently enlarged so that, as the Long Walls, they ran down to the Piraeus and made Athens impregnable.) All that was left on the rocky surface of the Acropolis were the foundations of the planned temples. When the procession of the Panathenaea arrived on the summit each year, it would have found a desolate site. (Jeffrey Hurwit, *The Athenian Acropolis: History, Mythology and Archaeology from the Neolithic Era to the Present*, Cambridge and New York, 1999, already cited, is fundamental here.)

The first new commission for the rock came in 457. It was for a vast bronze statue of Athena Promachos, Athena as the warrior defender of the city. It was to be financed from the spoils of the wars against the Persians, possibly as a commemoration of Cimon's victory at the Eurymedon river ten years before. The statue was some thirty feet high and the glint of Athena's spear could be seen as far off as Cape Sounion. It was one of the earliest commissions of Pheidias, a brilliant Athenian sculptor.

For ten years the statue stood alone but then Pericles decided that the temple to Athena Parthenos must be rebuilt on its original site. It was to be a grand commission made of the finest Pentelic marble and rich in sculptural decoration. The problem was finding the money. By now, the treasury of the Delian League had been transferred to Athens and Pericles brazenly diverted it to his programme. It was too much for his critics. Pericles' biographer Plutarch recorded their outrage, here in the English poet John Dryden's famous translation. 'Greece cannot but resent it as an insufferable affront, and consider herself to be tyrannized over openly, when she sees the treasure, which was contributed by her upon a necessity for the war, wantonly lavished out by us upon our city, to gild her all over, and to adorn and set her forth, as it were some vain woman, hung round with precious stones and figures and temples, which cost a world of money.' Pericles' retort was that so long as Athens honoured her promise to defend her allies, then the money was hers to use as she wished.

Building began in 447 BC. Pheidias was involved from the start. His greatest contribution was the colossal gold and ivory cult statue of Athena that was to dominate the interior of the temple. The cost of the gold alone, a ton of it, would have been enough to finance a fleet of 300 triremes, the total cost over seven times that of the Athena Promachos. Perched on the hand of the goddess was Nike, the goddess of victory. Athena's shield portrayed Athens battling her mythological enemies, a symbolic memory of her recent victory over the Persians. A pool of water was placed in front of the statue, reflecting it (but also providing humidity for the sheets of ivory that Pheidias had carefully cut from tusks). So when approached through the wide doors at the front of the Parthenon, it would have been a shimmering and awe-inspiring sight.

Around this forty-foot creation, the temple rose. Building began on the foundations of the earlier Parthenon with some of the original marble being reused. Some 20,000 tons were needed from the quarries of Mount Pentelikon 16 kilometres away. The temple was always planned to be spectacular and the refinements were impressive. The platform on which the temple stood was slightly domed, the columns subtly swollen and each leant inwards, those in the outside row more so than the inner ones so that, if extended, they would all have met at a single point far above the temple. The sophisticated understanding that straight lines can create the illusion of being otherwise and so need to be corrected was effected with meticulous accuracy. Building techniques were also advanced. A restoration in the early 1900s saw the marble being corroded by the new iron clasps; the fifth-century BC Athenians had covered the iron in lead to make sure this did not happen. (Mary Beard's *The Parthenon*, 2nd edition (to include details of the new Acropolis

Museum), London, 2010, is a lively introduction. See also the essays in Jennifer Neils (ed.), *The Parthenon: From Antiquity to the Present*, Cambridge and New York, 2005.)

It took five years for the walls to reach roof level and before this was begun a series of metopes, rectangular reliefs, were sculpted and lifted into place above the architrave where they could be clearly seen from the ground. They show a battle between humans and centaurs. The centaurs are frenzied, the humans restrained and calm in their resolute combat. So here is humanity that has risen above the emotions that can sway or destroy those that succumb to them, a theme also to be found in contemporary philosophies of moderation. Some see the hand of Pheidias here but, as he was still busy on his cult statue until 438, it is unlikely. Even so he must have been deeply involved in the overall conception of the temple's design, especially its sculpture. He was on site every day, one great statue completed, another being ingeniously crafted (and a third, the massive Zeus at Olympia, still to be conceived).

The Parthenon is essentially a Doric temple, as was common on the Greek mainland, but the final embellishment, the frieze that ran around the inner colonnade, followed Ionian precedents. Here Athens may have been acknowledging her Ionian subjects in the eastern Aegean. The frieze was never planned in the sumptuous form it finally took but the confidence of the builders and their patrons must have grown with time. The theme is the Panathenaic procession, although there are hints that it was being presented as set in a mythological past, perhaps celebrating too the heroes of Marathon. (Attractive and ingenious though this theory is, it involves some selective counting. The heroic-looking charioteers would have to be excluded but the marshals and grooms included if the numbers are to work.) On the west, north, and southern walls, the procession leads towards the eastern façade. There are horsemen and chariots and then those on foot, elders, musicians, and men with water jugs with the sacrificial oxen in front of them. It is fascinating to see the chariots used in the procession are drawn by four horses, always a sign of elite or divine status. So the Athenian citizens are seeing themselves as worthy of divine or at least aristocratic honour.

The sculptures were completed, in 432, by the pediment scenes that showed off Athena's relationship with her city. On the eastern pediment the birth of Athena was recorded, on the western Athena competes successfully with Poseidon for the patronage of the city. Plutarch, writing at the beginning of the second century AD, well over 500 years after the Parthenon was built, was still amazed by the building. It remains 'untouched by the wear of time... it is as if some ever-flowering life and unaging spirit had been infused into the creation of these works.'

As the temple was being built, a ceremonial entrance way, the Propylon, was being constructed at the western end of the Acropolis. Work came to a halt in 432, just before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, and the Propylon was not completed during Pericles' lifetime. Much later the shrine of Athena Polias was rebuilt. The site was the home of different cults and the building had to be adapted to fit them. The completed complex became known as the Erechtheum, in honour of

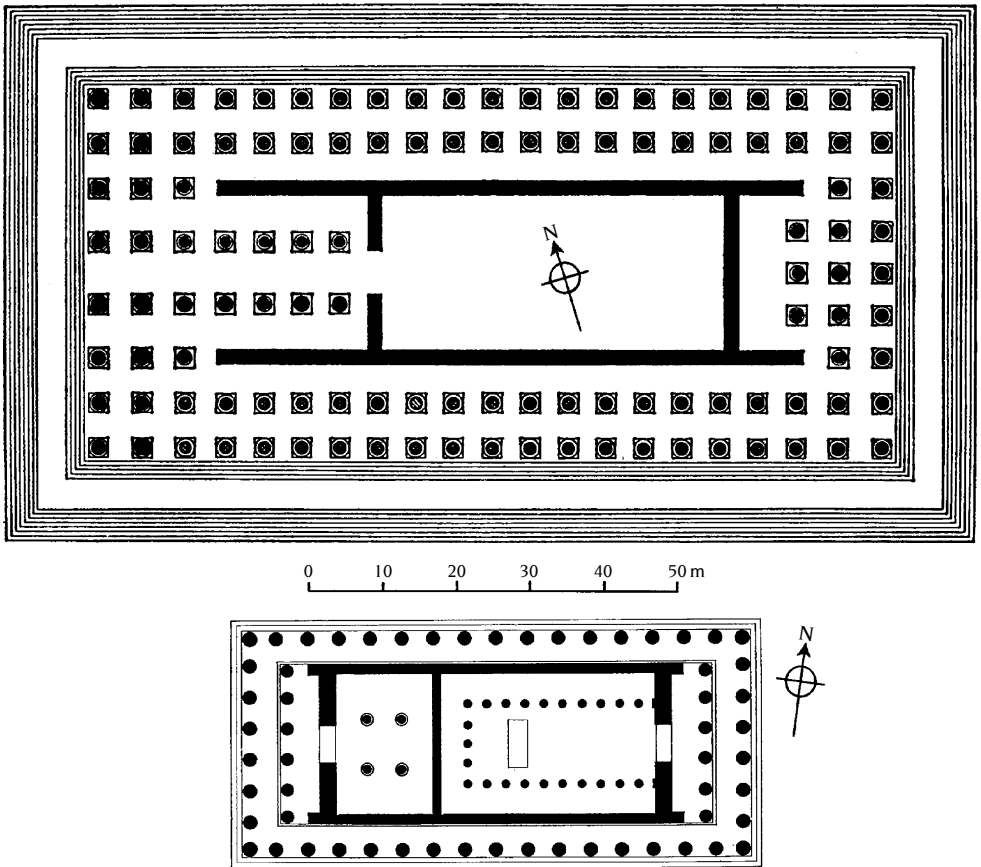


FIG. 5 The Parthenon and the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus. Imposing though the Parthenon (below) is, and it is the largest of the Doric temples, it was dwarfed by the vast temples of the Ionian Greeks such as the fourth century Temple of Artemis at Ephesus (above). It is possible that the Ionians were directly influenced by the massive temples of Egypt.

Erechtheus, a mythological king of Athens. One of the most exquisite temples of all, that of Athena Nike, Athena as victor, was placed on the south-western tip of the rock, ironically just before Athens was defeated by Sparta in 404.

The Athenian Empire

This pride of the city was also sustained by the emergence of Athens as a fully-fledged empire. Without the restraining influence of Cimon, the city now became even more ruthless in its overseas affairs. After 461, protection of the city against Sparta was the priority. Following the breakdown of relations with her former ally

the Athenians had moved quickly, in 460 BC, to make an alliance with Sparta's old enemy, Argos. The next step was to control the Isthmus (through which any invading force of Spartans would have to pass to reach Athens). When the neighbouring city of Megara approached Athens for protection from Corinth, she found herself taken over and garrisoned by Athens. Athens then dealt with her oldest rival, the island of Aegina, only a few kilometres from her coast and a competitor for trade for generations. Troops from the League were used to besiege her and finally to incorporate her into the League (458). Pericles was once again the driving force here. (He was always careful to use troops from other members of the league when he could to avoid having to announce Athenian casualties to the Assembly.)

This active policy in the west took place at the same time as a major expedition by troops of the League to the east. One target was Cyprus, strategically placed close to the Asian coast and not yet a member of the League. An expedition arrived there in the late 460s, but when news came through in 459 that the Egyptians had risen against Persian rule the expedition was diverted. It was too good an opportunity to miss. Persian control over Egypt was likely to be weak and the chance of access to the immense fertility of the Nile valley, especially its grain supplies, irresistible. Athens's army was stationed in the Delta and occupied Memphis. About 454, however, in what appears to have been a major disaster, it was driven out by a Persian army. The details are poorly recorded but as many as 250 ships may have been lost with most of their crews. There is no doubt that Athens was placed on the defensive and that soon afterwards the treasury of the League at Delos was moved from its exposed position in the centre of the Aegean to Athens.

In the 450s Athens also conducted a number of campaigns into central Greece. (They were known collectively as the First Peloponnesian War.) Her objectives were varied: to dominate the Isthmus and so keep the Peloponnese closed off, to bully Corinth into the Athenian rather than Spartan camp, and to exploit the fertile plains of Thessaly, the pastures of the best horses in Greece. (Control of the plains would also offer access to the timber- and mineral-rich lands of northern Greece.) The campaigns brought Athens face to face with Sparta for the first time. In 457 Sparta had sent an army north to support her mother city, Doris, against an attack by her neighbour Phocis. As the successful Spartan army returned south, rumours reached Athens that it was in contact with anti-democratic factions in the city. The Athenians, with League support, sent an army over the Attic border to confront it. At the Battle of Tanagra, in which Pericles fought, both sides had heavy losses but the Spartans were able to withdraw and make for home. Their survival was enough for the Dorians to claim victory over 'Argives, Athenians and Ionians'. Yet just two months after their withdrawal, Athens gained control of the whole of the Boeotian plain with the exception of Thebes, its largest city.

The later campaigns in central Greece must have been affected by the losses in Egypt. In the event it proved impossible for Athens to sustain any long-term control over such a large region. By the early 440s the western cities of the plain had broken free of Athenian control and an army sent to restore it was decisively defeated at

Coronea (447). There were revolts in Euboea and Megara, and Megara was now lost to Athens. It was a major blow and left Athens vulnerable to direct attack by Sparta. (The Spartans did, in fact, invade Attica but soon withdrew for reasons that have never been made clear.) Over the winter of 446/445 Athens and Sparta made a formal peace (the so-called Thirty Years Peace) by which each recognized each other's alliances. The potential stalemate in any conflict, the inability of Athens to defend an extended border and the impossibility of the Spartans actually taking Athens, now defended behind the Long Walls, was clear.

Although the Peace put an end to Athenian intrusions in central Greece, it did allow the city to develop an empire in the Aegean without interference from Sparta. Up to 449 Athens had been able to use the threat of Persia as a means of forcing the smaller League members into dependence on her. In 451 Cimon's ten years of exile were up and he was still energetic enough to lead an Athenian force against Persia in Cyprus. However, he died while on campaign and in 449 it is possible that a peace treaty (the so-called Peace of Callias) was made with Persia. There is some dispute over this treaty as Thucydides makes no mention of it and the earliest reference is a fourth-century source. However, there is no further recorded hostility between Athens and Persia in the fifth century.

Furthermore, there is a gap in the records of tribute paid to the League's treasury, now in Athens, for 448. This is understandable if the main *raison d'être* of the League's existence had disappeared and members refused to continue their contributions. There is evidence that Athens may have attempted to refound the League as a much larger alliance of Greek states and suspended all tribute payments while the details were being settled. However, the refusal of Sparta to acquiesce in a blatant extension of Athenian power across the wider Greek world led to the plan's failure. In 447 Athens resumed her demands for tribute but the total collected was much smaller than that raised in 449. Clearly some states balked at restarting payments. By 446 Athens had reasserted control and the tribute was back to normal levels (600 talents a year). From now on Athens acted as if she was an imperial power rightfully exacting tribute from her subjects. One source from the 440s talks of 'the cities that the Athenians control'. When the city of Chalcis was subdued after the revolt in Euboea of 446, she had to promise loyalty to Athens alone. No mention was made of the League. The Council of the League stopped meeting, probably during the 440s. All the evidence suggests, therefore, that Athens was now set on domination of the Aegean in her own right.

There seem to have been well over 200 subject states of the empire. Virtually every island of the Aegean was a member. Athenian control stretched along the Asian coastline from Rhodes up to the Hellespont, through into the Black Sea and round southern Thrace as far as the Chalcidice peninsula. Nearer home the cities of Euboea and the island of Aegina were subjects. The tribute expected was not burdensome and was reduced after 445 presumably because Athens was at peace with both Persia and Sparta. The average sum was two talents a member, less than it took to keep an Athenian trireme in service for a year.



MAP 5

Athens used a variety of methods to keep control of her empire. One indirect method was to use *proxenoi*, citizens of a subject city who were expected to represent Athens's interests there. Some key cities had cleruchies (the term originates from one who is allotted land overseas while retaining citizenship at home) imposed on them. Poorer Athenians were often given preference in the allocation of places in these settlements. (Pericles' motives, claimed Plutarch, included the desire to rid the city of riff-raff.) When Lesbos revolted in the 420s, for instance, land was confiscated and then distributed to Athenian citizens, with the incentive for prospective settlers that the native population could be used as labour. The demand was such that the plots of land had to be allocated by lot.

Cleruchies are recorded in at least twenty-four cities in Thrace, the Chersonese (the northern coastline of the Hellespont), and on the islands of Naxos and Andros. There is no doubt that the main motive was to strengthen Athens's control of these cities, which either had a history of revolt or were strategically important. There is also evidence of richer Athenians gaining land overseas. It may have been handed

out by the state as a means of buying off aristocratic dissent but served as well to maintain her dominance.

The sources suggest other symbols of Athenian predominance. There were attempts to enforce a cultural unity centred on the worship of Athena. All members of the League were now expected to attend the Greater Panathenaea bringing a cow and a shield and helmet with them and marching in the procession. (This helped reinforce the old belief that Athens was the mother city of the Ionian states.) A Coinage Decree, possibly passed in 445, required the allies to use only Athenian weights, measures, and silver coinage. This ensured the prosperity of the Athenian silver mines as well as exploiting the propaganda value of her distinctive coins. Important judicial cases were to be referred to Athens, while Athens also took an interest in supporting democracy against oligarchy. The city of Erythrae in Ionia had a 'democratic' constitution imposed on her as early as the 450s and Samos possibly went through the same experience after a revolt in 440/439. There is some evidence that local democrats in subject cities were able to use Athenian support to bolster their own position, and the feeling among the masses that Athens would support them against the wealthy oligarchs may have been one reason for the empire's long-term stability.

The evidence from the 440s and 430s is of a city gradually consolidating its position wherever its trading interests required. In 443 Athens set up a colony at Thurii in the instep of Italy (on the site of the city of Sybaris, which had been destroyed by its neighbours in 510). An alliance followed with Rhegium on the Italian side of the Straits of Messina. This suggests an increasing interest in the riches of the west. Meanwhile a new city was founded at Amphipolis, upriver from Eion, in the northern Aegean, where control could be held over the river crossing. The city offered access not just to timber but to the gold mines of Mount Pangaeon. Amphipolis was to acquire a mystique rather similar to that of the commercial centre of Singapore for the British empire, and its loss to Sparta in 424 was to be as deeply felt.

The Athenian empire was in many senses a conservative and even defensive one. It had no internal dynamic. Despite the seizure of land in some areas, there was never the deliberate and ruthless exploitation of resources on the scale followed by later trading states such as Venice. Insofar as a transfer of resources took place, it seems to have been from the wealthier members of the subject cities to the Athenian oarsmen and Athens's own richer citizens. Its main purpose could be seen as maintenance of control over trade routes. Yet Athenian hegemony over the Aegean lasted for seventy-five years, all the more remarkable an achievement in view of its extent.

The empire allowed Athens to build up financial reserves. Thucydides describes the treasury holding 9,300 talents at its height, but, since a single siege could soak up three years' worth of tribute, the empire was particularly vulnerable to revolts. If a revolt was allowed to succeed, the myth of Athenian superiority would be exploded. When Samos rebelled in 440, Pericles and his nine fellow generals were sent to deal with the island. Samos was recaptured at some cost and no other city joined the rebellion. There is no doubt, however, of the resentment felt by many

ordinary subjects of the empire. When some decades later, in 377, Athens tried to rebuild a naval confederacy, she could only get the Aegean cities to join by promising them that none of the impositions of empire, including the seizure of land and the payment of tribute, would be renewed.

The Changing World of Athenian Democracy

The 430s were the last great age of Athenian optimism. By 431, Sparta and Athens were at war (detailed in Chapter 18) and the city had been ravaged by a terrible plague. After Athens had reached such a peak of intellectual and physical vigour, it is hard to imagine the city crawling with dying bodies in the shadow of the splendour of the Acropolis. Despite moments of success the war was to end in 404 BC in disaster for Athens and the city was lucky not to be humiliated by the destruction of its walls by the victorious Spartans.

Yet democracy was to survive in Athens until 322 BC and the different contexts in which it functioned will be explored here. Much has been learned as a result of the large increase in written texts, especially those recorded on stone. Twenty thousand inscriptions in total have been found in Attica alone. Fifth-century Athens was especially rich in ‘political’ inscriptions, with the Decree of Themistocles and other decrees, the Tribute Lists, treaties, and funerary inscriptions among them. A further 500 decrees survive from the fourth century. ‘They were’, suggests James Whitely, writing of inscriptions in general, ‘monuments to a democratic idea, their erection and inscription a performance of public accountability—an outward, durable and visible sign of the public character of the Athenian state.’ However, dating, finding precise translations and establishing the public context in which they were placed is daunting. Scholars such as H. B. Mattingley have carried out meticulous analyses of how individual Greek letters changed their form over time so that inscriptions can be dated by the change.

So what do the inscriptions tell us about Athenian democracy? The interaction between politicians continued to drive events. Many speeches, some 150 in total, survive. Some, those of the great teacher Isocrates (436–338), for instance, were samples used in training, many others were authentic forensic speeches designed to manipulate an audience to a desired result. (See further Interlude 4.) However, decisions needed to be recorded and achievements applauded. The tribute lists, which, in fact, show only the one-sixtieth of the annual tribute that was dedicated to Athena herself, were set out on tall columns that acted as a form of imperial propaganda in themselves.

To the inscriptions can be added the narrative of the historian Thucydides for the last years of the fifth century (see Chapter 18 for Thucydides). So some chronology of political events can be re-created. In the despair that followed the outbreak of war and the plague in 431, the Assembly turned against Pericles, fined him, and deposed him from his generalship (although he was soon re-elected, ‘as is the way

with crowds', remarked Thucydides). He died in the summer of 429 of some lingering illness probably related to the plague.

After Pericles' death new leaders arose, the so-called 'demagogues', who were accused by their rivals of manipulating the emotions of the Assembly for their personal advantage. Thucydides was hostile to them, he even suggests the lack of a Pericles was one reason why Athens lost the war, but the picture of the 'demagogues' that has survived may well be a distorted one, the traditional prejudice of the aristocrat against the upstart. Another source, *The Constitution of the Athenians*, whose author is conventionally known as the 'Old Oligarch', is scathing about the ignorance and lack of education of the masses. 'As things are, anyone who wishes can stand up and talk, disreputable though he might be, and he will gain what is beneficial for himself and those like him.' Certainly these leaders, of whom Cleon, Hyperbolus, and Cleophon were the most prominent, came from manufacturing rather than landed aristocratic backgrounds. Cleon owned a tannery, Hyperbolus a factory for making lamps, and Cleophon made lyres. They did not aim to become generals and concentrated their energies on building up support within the Assembly. They competed for power with the generals such as Nicias and Alcibiades (see further below, p. 299) whose origins were more aristocratic.

A famous example of the new volatility, recounted by Thucydides, was the debate on the treatment of the people of Mytilene after the city had revolted against Athens in 427. At first the Assembly, swayed by impassioned oratory, decreed that all the Mytilenean men should be executed and the women and children enslaved. A trireme was sent off with the order. The next day the Assembly, in more sober mood, reversed the decision. (A second trireme reached the city in the nick of time.) In 406 there was a debate over the fate of the generals who after a naval victory at Arginusae had left the scene without picking up survivors (their defence being that a violent storm had made this impossible). Various proposals were put forward as a means of assessing their guilt, some of which appeared to be unconstitutional. The mass of the Assembly shouted that the decision should be left to the people, even if this meant disregarding normal procedures, and went on to order the execution of those six generals who had arrived back in Athens. Later, however, but only when it was too late, the Assembly again repented of its harshness (and rather hypocritically accused the main speakers of 'forcing' the people to act the way they did).

Athenian democracy was subverted on two occasions. In 411, after an Athenian expedition to Sicily ended in disaster, the Assembly surrendered its power to a Council of Four Hundred. This was overthrown after four months, and an Assembly whose membership was limited to the richer 5,000 citizens was introduced. This only lasted until 410, when full democracy was restored. In 404 the Spartans, now finally victorious, imposed a Commission of Thirty on Athens, the 'Thirty Tyrants' as they became known. They could only survive with a supporting garrison of 700 men and launched a reign of terror in which some 1,500 Athenians may have died. In the winter of 404/403 the democrats, with Theban help, launched a counter-coup. The Piraeus was seized and the Thirty overthrown. The restored democracy

was to last until its overthrow by the Macedonians in 322 and is a testament to its underlying resilience.

The character of fourth-century democracy in Athens was subtly different from that of the fifth century. The city appeared sobered by the devastating experience of the Peloponnesian War, in particular by the volatility of decision-making, as shown in the Assembly, and the experience of the 'Thirty Tyrants'. A new respect was now evoked for the traditional laws (the *nomoi*) of the city. Between 410 and 399 these laws were codified and inscribed for all to see on the walls of one of the stoas. Henceforth, if any law was to be changed or a new one introduced it had to be done by a modified procedure. A legislative body, the *nomothetai*, was set up. It consisted of all members of the Boule plus 1,001 citizens drawn from the jury lists for the year. Any change in the law was first proposed by the Assembly but then had to be debated before the much smaller *nomothetai*, which decided by simple majority whether it should be accepted. The principle of democratic involvement was maintained, but modified to allow the Assembly's decisions to be reconsidered. The Assembly could still pass decrees, *psephismata*, but now these were limited in scope or only valid for a short period. Any speaker who proposed a measure that was contrary to existing laws without going through the new procedure could now be prosecuted and the proposed law declared invalid. The prosecution took place before jurors in the traditional way, and in effect the jurors were now deciding whether a particular decree of the Assembly was valid or not.

There is also evidence that the Areopagus, still an unelected body of former magistrates who sat on it for life, was revived as an important part of the constitution in the fourth century. By now, however, the property qualification for archons had disappeared, so the body was more broadly constituted than it had been a hundred years earlier. In 403/402 the Assembly had decreed that the Areopagus was to supervise the administration of laws by the magistrates. In the 340s the Areopagus acquired the power to try, on its own initiative, political leaders who had, in its opinion, tried to overthrow democracy or were guilty of treason or bribery. Its verdict was then passed to the jurors for confirmation. In addition there are examples, from the second half of the century, of the Areopagus actually intervening to annul the elections of officials by the Assembly.

As Mogens Hansen has argued in his *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes* (2nd edition, London, 1999), the fullest study of Athenian democracy for this period, these changes were justified by the Athenians on the grounds that the traditional laws of the Athenian state from the days of Solon and Cleisthenes were simply being restored. This was nonsense, of course, but, as in 461, an appeal to some ancestral constitution of the past was the only way to bring about political change. 'Like many Greeks,' writes Hansen, 'the Athenians had a soft spot for the "golden age", the belief that everything was better in olden times and that consequently the road to improvement lay backwards and not forwards.' The result was that the Athenians maintained confidence in their democracy and it survived until overthrown in 322. In many ways, with the powers of the Assembly restricted, Athenian democracy was more mature in the fourth century than it was in the fifth,

while the distinction made between laws (*nomoi*) and decrees (*psephismata*) was a forerunner of a similar distinction made by the Founding Fathers of the American Constitution between the clauses of the Constitution and laws proposed by Congress which could not overrule them. The penetrating studies of the use of political language by Josiah Ober confirm that the fourth century saw a stability in the political system that was achieved without any sacrifice of the ideals of 461.

The nineteenth-century French writer Alexis de Tocqueville described Athenian democracy as 'an aristocracy of masters'. While there was always more leisure time in pre-industrial economies, particularly in the slack periods of the agricultural year, it can be argued that democracy would not have survived without slavery and an income from empire and, perhaps more important, from the trade that allowed citizens to be paid as jurymen, administrators, and legislators. The Athenians believed, or allowed themselves to be convinced by Pericles, that they were superior to the citizens of other cities (although there were many other democratic states in Greece whose constitutions have not survived). Here is Pericles speaking in the winter of 431/430 at the annual festival at which the Athenians commemorated their dead (the so-called Funeral Oration):

Remember that this city has the greatest name among all mankind because she has never yielded to adversity, but has spent more lives in war and has endured more severe hardships than any other city. She has held the greatest power known to men up to our time, and the memory of her power will be laid up forever for those who come after. Even if we now have to yield (since all things that grow also decay), the memory shall remain that of all the Greeks, we held sway over the greatest number of Hellenes; that we stood against our foes, both when they were united and when each was alone, in the greatest ways; and that we inhabited a city wealthier and greater than all... The splendour of the present is the glory of the future laid up as a memory for all time. Take possession of both, zealously choosing honour for the future and avoiding disgrace in the present. (Translation: Paul Rahe)

He goes on to praise the harmony of the city, the mutual tolerance of its citizens, and the respect shown for the laws and the concept of justice.

Pericles is here claiming high ideals for his city. In fact, he is doing nothing less than transferring the values and achievements once prized by individual aristocrats to the citizens of Athens collectively (remember the four-horse chariots on the Parthenon frieze!). Already, however, he is recording the first doubts that these ideals will continue to be realized and the plague itself, as recorded by Thucydides, portrays anything but a mutually supportive community. As Bernard Knox has shrewdly pointed out, these words suggest that Athens was, like a Sophoclean hero, 'in love with the impossible'.

It is certainly true that Athenian democracy demanded a consistent involvement that is rather forbidding to modern minds. 'We do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say he has no business here at all,' argues Pericles in the same Funeral Oration. The contrast with modern political thought is striking. Contemporary human rights centre on the right of the individual (every individual, not just those enjoying citizen status) to protection against the power of the state. This is a concept that the Athenians would have

found difficult to grasp. They despised those who withdrew from public life. (The Greek word *idiotes*, from which the English ‘idiot’ is derived, meant one who put private pleasures before public duty and who was, for this reason, ignorant of everything that really mattered.) The Athenian citizen was not without protection. He could always argue his case before a jury, but ultimately a decision of a jury or the use of ostracism was final and there was no appeal to any higher principle than that of the will of the people. Socrates (for whose trial see later, p. 282) and the generals who survived Arginusae found this to their cost. It is easy to point to the shortcomings and contradictions of Athenian democracy. However, it remains unique as the world’s only example of a successfully functioning and sustained direct democracy. It lasted for nearly 140 years—a remarkable achievement in a period of history where instability was the norm.

In his absorbing study *The Greeks and the New* (Cambridge, 2011), Armand D'Angour argues that innovation was built into the cut and thrust of spoken and written debate in ancient Greece. He places the culmination of this process in fifth-century Athens (chapter 9 of his book). Certainly Athens buzzed with cultural energy. The city was wealthy and receptive and it had attracted intellectuals from across the Greek world. These, as well as those who shared their approach to ideas in Athens, are known as the sophists, a word which in its original meaning suggested a combination of intellectual curiosity with practical skills in the art of living. The philosopher Socrates recorded that sophists teach 'the kind of wisdom and virtue which fits men to manage an estate or govern a city, to look after their parents and to entertain and send off guests in proper style', but they ranged much more widely than this. Many of those reaching Athens came from other democratic cities and so they were used to revelling in free debate. Their prime skill lay in teaching rhetoric but they contributed more than this. While the sophists were never a school they were naturally unconventional, ready to challenge received opinion and to explore how far they could persuade through argument. As Aristophanes claims in his play *The Clouds*, a satire on the new thinking (see further below, p. 279): 'I don't try to fool you by repeating the same material again and again, but I always act the sophist and introduce new ideas, all totally different from each other and all brilliant [!]' (See John Dillon and Tania Gergel (eds. and trans.), *The Greek Sophists*, Penguin Classics, London and New York, 2003.)

The image of the sophists was tarnished in the century that followed by the assault that the philosopher Plato made on their endeavours. Plato had a lofty ideal of philosophy as an enterprise carried out for its own sake and when he saw the sophists charging for teaching rhetoric he felt they were degrading themselves. He had a more profound philosophical objection. Too often, he claimed, the sophists revelled in the process of debate itself, ready to develop arguments on whichever side of the case they chose. They had not found underlying truths that were independent of emotion and rhetoric. Plato, however, excluded his hero Socrates from his charge and when he wrote his philosophical dialogues, he used Socrates as the Platonic figure who would challenge named sophists from the century before.

One of Plato's victims is to be found in his dialogue *Protagoras*. Protagoras, from Abdera in Thrace, is often seen as the father figure of the Athenian sophists. He may

have been born as early as 490 and travelled widely in Greece before visiting Athens in the 440s. Here he is reported as teaching rhetoric for which he charged high fees. Speaking was a much sought after skill for anyone making their way in public life and he found a ready market among the young social elite.

There was more to Protagoras than this. In 444 he was used by Pericles to draw up a constitution for an Athenian colony in Thurii in southern Italy. He was also deeply interested in the problems of knowledge, even if the few surviving fragments of his writings are hard to interpret. The most famous is 'Man is the measure of all things: of things which are, that they are, and of things which are not, that they are not.' It is difficult to place this within a wider context but Protagoras noted how individuals would explain or experience the world through their own eyes so that what might be hot for one person might be cold for another. He accepted that a person might feel hot because, demonstrably, he had a fever but he still left open the question of whether there was an objective way of determining heat and cold. To place man at the centre of things also implied a diminution of the power of the gods and Protagoras proved himself a sceptic here. The subject was too challenging and life too short to resolve the issue.

Other sophists went further by suggesting that the gods might merely be imagined, perhaps originating in man's experience of nature as Prodicus of Ceos (c.465–c.395 BC) argued. They were no more than personifications of natural phenomena such as the sun and the moon, rivers, water, and fire. The Athenian poet Critias, in a fragment preserved from his play *Sisyphus*, developed the theme. 'I believe', he argued, 'that a man of shrewd and subtle mind invented for men the fear of the gods, so that there might be something to frighten the wicked even if they acted, spoke or thought in secret.' In other words, the gods were purely a human creation, invented as a means of social control.

Another of Plato's targets is confronted in his *Gorgias*. The real Gorgias had arrived in Athens in 427 from the Sicilian city of Leontini to ask the Athenians for an alliance. Gorgias' speech was reported as being 'in a new style' and it gripped his younger listeners. Gorgias was soon showing off his oratorical skills. In his *On Nature*, which only survives in later quotations, he tackled the question as to whether the world was an illusion and how far knowledge of it could be communicated between individuals. Not enough survives to tell how he developed this argument but it shows that he was able to play about with philosophical issues and challenge convention. In his more famous speech, *The Encomium [Defence] of Helen*, he argued, more provocatively, that Helen was morally blameless for leaving her husband Menelaus and making off to Troy with Paris. He suggested possible reasons for her actions: she was impelled to do so by fate, she was abducted by force, Paris's words were enough to sway her, or she may genuinely have been in love. Each of these possibilities relieved her of moral responsibility. At the end of the speech, Gorgias seemed ready to acknowledge that he might not have been persuasive and so left open the question of how far rhetoric was simply a device to persuade. It was this approach that Plato challenged in his dialogue.

Plato's condemnation of the sophists now seems much too harsh. Their presence in Athens was invigorating in itself and by challenging convention they forced

people to think for themselves. Fundamental to sophistic thought was the distinction between the natural order of things, the underlying, unchanging parameters of existence (*phusis*), and convention (*nomos*). The sophists confronted the quandary of whether one constrained the other or whether conventions were the public expression of the natural order. The sophists were also interested in language, how the meanings of words shifted according to context. So they are often seen as the founders of linguistics. Prodicus was respected for his careful analysis of language and the importance he applied to the correct use of words.

The sophists were adamant that philosophical life must not cut the intellectual off from the real world. One visiting sophist, Hippias of Elis, from southern Italy, boasted of how he had visited Olympia having made everything he was wearing or had brought with him including his oil can. Hippias was an example of a true polymath. The surviving fragments show that his contributions ranged over astronomy, mathematics, language, history, poetry, music, and even archaeology. The truth is that the sophists overflowed with confidence and just enjoyed debating anything that came up.

In traditional accounts of Greek thought, the sophists are grouped together as if they were segregated from other spheres of intellectual life. However, one only has to read Herodotus' enquiries on why the Nile floods or how the Egyptian way of life contrasted with that of the Greeks to see they were typical of the milieu of ideas that pervaded Athens. (See Rosalind Thomas, *Herodotus in Context: Ethnography, Science and the Art of Persuasion*, Cambridge and New York, 2000.) The rigorous approach Thucydides takes to his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, one in which he sees the unfolding of events as the result of human action, and not of divine intervention, is in the same tradition. Perhaps most interesting of all is the extent to which sophistic thought pervaded the work of the great Athenian tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.

The Drama Festivals

Athens was a community of shared experiences and there could hardly have been a more communal activity than drama. The drama festivals were celebrations of Dionysus, god of fertility and sexual abandon. His festivities, throughout Greece, were ones in which conventions were thrown aside and women, in particular, took the chance to engage in wild dancing among the pine forests. Traditionally the cult worship of Dionysus involved participants changing identity and wearing masks. In Athens, however, the celebrations of the god became more formal. At the Great Dionysia, held each spring, Dionysus' statue, alongside phalluses, symbols of the sexual licence acceptable to the god, was carried in open procession to the theatre just below the Acropolis. Then the city and its visitors congregated to hear a range of dramatic performances in which poets competed with each other for prizes. (An estimated 14,000 people, including 1,200 actors and singers, participated in the Great Dionysia, probably the largest gathering in the Greek world outside the

Olympic Games.) The Dionysia had an added importance as a propaganda exercise—it was the occasion at which tribute from the empire was presented to the city and the ten generals met to offer libations. A smaller festival, the Lenaea, was held in January, a time of year when travel was too difficult for foreigners to attend. Drama was a fusion of religion, democratic pride, and creative thought.

The supreme examples of Athenian dramatic art are the tragedies. (See Pat Easterling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, Cambridge and New York, 1997.) The origin of the word is obscure. The Greek *tragoidia* means ‘goat song’, and ingenious but inconclusive attempts have been made to link the plays to sacrifice of a goat or the winning of a goat as a prize. The roots of drama appear to lie in the late 500s after Eleutherae, a town on the border of Attica, had been incorporated into Athenian territory. Eleutherae had its own important festival to Dionysus ‘of the black goatskin’ and the rituals of this festival appear to have been transferred to Athens, where they were performed in public, as a means of confirming the integration of Eleutherae into the city-state. At some point one of the chorus appears to have stood aside from the rituals to explain their relevance to the watching audience. The next step, attributed to the Athenian tragedian Aeschylus, was to introduce a second ‘actor’, and thus allow scenes between actors with the chorus left to introduce themes or comments on events as they unfolded. Sophocles added a third, allowing even more complex interactions between characters.

By the fifth century the rituals of the drama festivals were well established. Each festival began with twenty dithyrambs, lyric poems sung by a chorus of fifty. Each of the ten tribes of Athens entered a men’s and boys’ chorus. Then came the tragedies. Three poets were selected for each festival and they each produced three plays that could be linked in theme. Each trilogy was followed by a satyr play. The satyrs were the companions of Dionysus, and with large pendulous phalluses attached to their waists were represented in wild frolics. Finally, on the fourth day of the festival, five different poets offered a comedy each. The plays were financed by the *choregos*, a rich citizen who was honoured for taking this role, an element of aristocratic patronage that continued into democratic times. The final result has been described, by the classical historian J. K. Davies, as an amalgamation of upper-class lyric poetry with out-of-town bucolic Dionysiac ritual to produce entertainment of a type that hugely appealed to the newly enfranchised citizenry.

The earliest theatre to survive from the early fifth century is at Thorikos in southern Attica. The performances were held on a circular dancing floor, the *orchestra*, with a backdrop behind, the *skene* (hence the English ‘scene’), which housed a dressing-room. The audience watched from the *theatron* (the name given to any space where spectators sat and the origin of the English word ‘theatre’), seated in a semicircle, later provided with stone seats. The Theatre of Dionysus, on the southern slope of the Acropolis, was first given stone seats in the fourth century and there is a magnificent example of the same date at Epidauros, its acoustics perfect for even the highest of its 14,000 seats. Those seats remaining at Athens are Roman, but one can still sit today in the Theatre of Dionysus and read a speech from a tragedy on the very spot where it was first performed. Actors traditionally wore masks, and

many of these were stylized so that stock characters were easily recognizable. Smaller theatres were placed throughout Attica and plays could be repeated or revived in them.

The settings of tragedy, with rare exceptions such as Aeschylus' contemporary play *The Persians*, were in the myths with which Greek minds were saturated. The poet would adapt the story to suit his ends, but he could be sure that the audience would know something of the main characters and the events that unfolded. The theme usually centred on the tortured relationship between human beings and the gods. The human characters in Greek tragedy are often trapped. They have either committed some unforgivable sin or they are forced to choose between two honourable but incompatible courses of action. Either way they will offend a sacred code and are doomed. The dramatists did not take sides in the daunting dilemmas they portrayed. Aeschylus treated the Persians, in his play of that name, with scrupulous fairness, even though his audience was sitting among the ruins of the city the Persians had sacked only eight years before. The skill lay in allowing the full horror of the story gently but inexorably to unfold.

What is lost from the surviving plays is their music. Tunes and songs were normally passed on by example and so most have vanished. Music (from *mousike*, the art of the muses) was an essential ingredient in the drama festivals. The dithyramb consisted largely of dancing and singing and the tragedies and comedies were accompanied by flutes. Sophocles, in fact, was first known for his singing and dancing, and a legend says that it was he who led the paeon (the name given to a cult hymn to Apollo) after the great victory of Salamis.

Aeschylus

Only a tiny proportion of the work of the Athenian tragedians is preserved and almost all of this from three poets. The father of Greek tragic drama is Aeschylus (525–456 BC). Aeschylus was a public figure, who fought for his city at Marathon and possibly at Salamis as well. He seems to have been sympathetic to the coming of democracy. Certainly the city community takes a central place in his work. He is credited with eighty plays, but only six (there is some dispute over a seventh) survive, all from his later years. They include the only surviving play on a contemporary theme, *The Persians*, and the only complete trilogy, or cycle of three plays, which survives: the *Oresteia*.

Aeschylus was a man of deep religious sensibility with a strong belief in the underlying harmony of the world. This harmony was decreed and upheld by the gods, who would be offended by anyone who disturbed it. Crimes against harmony included destruction of the natural world, overweening pride (*hubris*), or breaches in the sacred conventions of warfare. However, what behaviour is actually demanded of men is not always clear. 'The paths of Zeus' mind stretch dark and tangled, impervious to sight,' as the words from one play, *The Suppliants*, put it. The possibilities of tragedy lie in men unwittingly upsetting the balance.

To make matters more complex Aeschylus allows the gods to actually tempt men into wrongdoing, as Zeus tempts Xerxes, the king of the Persians, into his invasion of Greece. Even more tragically, human beings may be placed by the gods in situations where they are forced to break one convention to uphold another. In *Seven against Thebes*, Eteocles, king of Thebes, has the sacred duty of protecting his city from attack. But one of the attackers is his brother. He can only fulfil his obligations by committing the crime of fratricide. Whichever path he chooses he is doomed.

It is one of Aeschylus' achievements as a poet to incorporate a sense of impending gloom into a tragedy from its earliest words. In *Agamemnon*, the first work of the trilogy *Oresteia*, the scene is set by a watchman who scours the night sky for the fire signalling that Troy has at last been captured by the Greeks. Something, however, makes him deeply uneasy about what should be a moment of triumph and joy. The audience learns that Agamemnon's fleet was only able to sail because a sacrifice was made, that of Agamemnon's daughter Iphigenia. (They would, of course, already have known of the myth and it would be the way that Aeschylus handled the outcome that would be waited for.) There is more anguish waiting for Agamemnon. His wife Clytemnestra is passionately involved with a lover, Aegisthus. She kills Agamemnon on his return. Agamemnon's crime, the murder of his daughter, is avenged, but Clytemnestra has caused another, the death of a husband, and his blood lies on her hands as she sets herself up with her lover as ruler. This is a common theme in Aeschylus. One transgression gives rise to another. In words from the second play in the trilogy, *The Libation Bearers*, 'the blood that mother earth consumes clots hard, it won't seep through, it breeds revenge'. In *The Libation Bearers* Orestes, the son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, returning from exile, feels it his duty to avenge his father's death by murdering his mother and killing Aegisthus. The burden of guilt is passed on. The polluted Orestes then flees to the sacred oracle at Delphi in the hope that he can be purified. He is pursued by the Furies, urged on by the ghost of Clytemnestra.

In the final play, the *Eumenides*, 'the Furies', Aeschylus moves towards resolution. There is a trial in which Apollo appears to support Orestes' case against the Furies and argue that he was justified. Apollo's argument turned on the Greek belief that human conception depended entirely on the male sperm, while the womb was merely a receptacle in which it grew into a human being. 'The woman you call the mother of the child is not the parent, just a nurse to the seed, the new sown seed that grows and swells inside her. The man is the source of life—the one who mounts.' Thus, to Apollo, Clytemnestra's crime of killing a man, her husband, and with it all possibilities of future human life, was worse than Orestes' killing of a mother who had no possibilities.

With a jury equally divided, it is Athena who casts the deciding vote in favour of Orestes for reasons which have been endlessly discussed by critics, but perhaps ultimately so as to uphold good order, moderation, and mercy against the unrestrained anger of the Furies. The city is also extolled by Athena as the truest security for good men. 'The stronger your fear,' says Athena, 'your reverence for the just, the stronger your country's wall and city's safety, stronger by far than all men else

possess in Scythia's rugged steppes or Pelops' level plain,' and the resolution of the play cannot be separated from the benefits of city government.

Aeschylus' characters are powerful figures but they are often undeveloped as individuals. It is as if they are used primarily as vehicles for the grandeur of Aeschylus' words and for stories that move relentlessly forward under their own weight to their tragic or harmonious conclusion. It is the language that is the chief glory of Aeschylus. It is both majestic and emotionally intense, well fitted to the themes of national pride and divine justice that are Aeschylus' main concerns.

Sophocles

In 468 the 57-year-old Aeschylus was defeated in the Dionysia by a man nearly thirty years his junior, Sophocles (496–406). The result almost certainly had political undertones. The Athenian aristocracy was still influential and Sophocles may have been used to displace a man of democratic sympathies. Aeschylus had his revenge when he won first prize in the following year.

Sophocles may have been of a younger generation but in many ways he looks back to an earlier age than Aeschylus. With Sophocles the focus turns from the city and community to the individual, both male and female. It was Sophocles who introduced the powerful independent woman into tragedy, a revolutionary move in a city where women were kept largely in seclusion. Sophocles writes of an earlier archaic world, one of heroes where loyalties are to clans and kin rather than to a city. It is a cruel and inflexible one with the ways of the gods incomprehensible to man. Most of Sophocles' characters have flaws in their personalities which lead them inexorably to their doom, and he shows the full range of torments that human beings can undergo, symbolized perhaps in the moment when Oedipus, king of Thebes, returns to the stage just having gouged out his eyes.

In *Antigone*, the heroine, Antigone, is rooted in the kinship system in which the religious duties of the clan predominate. She finds the body of her brother Polyneices and she must bury him as sacred custom demands. But Polyneices has been a traitor to his city and the king, Creon, has forbidden his burial. Antigone, with supreme moral conviction, goes ahead, ritually scattering dust on her brother's body. She is arrested and taken off to die by being buried alive. At the last moment Creon tries to change the decision but it is too late, Antigone has committed suicide and so have Creon's own wife and his son who has been engaged to her. The tragic individual is now Creon himself, but perhaps the underlying warning of the play is that inflexibility in support of absolute values does not provide the best guide for life. A ship, suggests Sophocles, would never arrive if it tried to sail head to wind.

The acknowledged masterpiece of Sophocles is *King Oedipus*. There is a contrast here with *Antigone*. While *Antigone* is trapped by the dictates of her own conscience, Oedipus has done everything he can to escape the prophecy that he will murder his father and sleep with his mother. In what is a spare, beautifully controlled play he learns to his horror that this is just what he has done. Polluted in

spite of himself, he gouges out his eyes when he comes across the body of his wife and mother Jocasta, who has committed suicide. (Nowhere else in Greek mythology is this incest/parricide theme explored, and Freud's influential interpretation that Oedipus unconsciously wished to kill his father is questionable, as Oedipus, an orphan from birth, did not even know that the man he killed was his father.)

In his last known play, *Oedipus at Colonus*, written when he was over 80, Sophocles comes back to Oedipus, now an old man, pathetic in his blindness, polluted by his 'crimes.' Death is near, and Oedipus makes his way to the sacred grove at Colonus for his last days. (Colonus was where Sophocles himself was born. The spot, swallowed up in recent years by the suburbs of Athens, has been replanted.) His daughters join him as others shun him and he finally meets death with nobility. That, suggests Sophocles, is the only appropriate response to the mysteries of fate. It is a profoundly Humanist moment in European literature; even the gods cannot rob a man of his dignity.

Sophocles was writing at darker times for Athens. The city was visited by plague and in the poet's final years was succumbing to the power of Sparta. Many have seen Sophocles' emphasis on the inexorable nature of suffering as arising from these experiences. Sophocles shows little enthusiasm for the city as a political entity. He suggests that democracy presents as many problems as it solves and can do little to sustain the individual at his time of need. Among those who reject Oedipus is a representative of the *polis*.

Euripides

The third great tragic poet of fifth-century Athens is Euripides (484–406). Although Euripides was only a few years younger than Sophocles, they seem to come from different worlds. While Sophocles looks back to a pre-democratic age, Euripides is relentlessly contemporary, at home with the uncertainties and restlessness of late fifth-century Athens. His reputation is as a moody and withdrawn genius (one legend relates how he wrote his plays in a cave on Salamis) with little interest in public life. Eighteen of his plays survive from over eighty that he wrote. Although picked many times to present tragedies, he was never as successful as Sophocles, winning only five first prizes, against Sophocles' twenty. (See the lively *Euripides, our Contemporary* by J. Michael Walton, London and Berkeley, 2009.)

It is in his treatment of the gods that Euripides shows that he is in tune with his times. This was a period where their relevance, even their existence, was questioned. Even if they exist, what is their nature? Why do they allow evil to occur? Why is the tyrant able to become wealthy and the pious man suffer? Despite the apparent implacability of the gods Euripides does not allow his characters to be burdened by divine power in the way Sophocles' are. In what is an important moment in European drama they actually answer back. 'You are a god full of madness or an unjust god,' is one cry in the play *Heracles*. If, as Euripides suggests, the gods might actually abandon human beings to their fate, they should not be allowed to do so unquestioned.

The result is a sharper focus on the characters themselves and their relationships with each other. They stand alone, the victims of their own emotions. In *Medea*, Medea has been abandoned by her husband, the cold and calculating Jason. She conceives of a plan to kill him and her children, partly to save them from being killed by others. Within her the conflicting forces of reason and emotion battle it out until the dreadful murders are finally committed. Here is the birth of domestic drama. The issues are on a completely different level from those public ones explored by Sophocles and Aeschylus. Medea differs from the characters of Sophocles—Antigone who is convinced she is doing right, despite the consequences of her actions, or Oedipus who suffers fate in spite of himself. Medea knows she is doing wrong but is impelled by her feelings to commit her crimes. As strong as the desire for revenge seen in *Medea* is that of obsessive love. In *Hippolytus*, Hippolytus is that rare figure in Greek life, a man who prefers celibacy. Phaedra, his stepmother, is overcome with desire for him but is angrily rejected. She kills herself, but just before she dies her distorted feelings make her declare that Hippolytus has shown incestuous love for her. Hippolytus dies after his father Theseus passes a curse on him and his chariot is smashed to pieces.

Euripides' plays break through the conventions of tragedy by showing human beings alone and responsible for their own actions, however strongly they are controlled by emotional forces they cannot understand. Euripides' concerns were not confined to private emotions. With a war raging around Athens he also meditated on the nature and use of power and political violence. In *The Trojan Women*, for instance, the brutalities of war are portrayed at a time when the Athenians had captured the city-state of Melos and butchered its inhabitants. In his *Helen* (412) Euripides suggests that it was not really Helen but a phantom of her that was taken to Troy and thus the war was fought for an illusion—a telling point when Athens had just suffered appalling losses in the Sicilian expedition (see below, p. 299). Euripides is continually probing below the surface with insight and imagination in an attempt to challenge the motives that drive men and women to act the way they do.

A major part of Euripides' genius, however, is his ability to switch from the most tortuous display of personal passions to pastoral beauty and lyricism. In his last play, *The Bacchae*, written in his final years when he had left Athens for Macedonia, the entire action is set in the hills and mountains. It is the choruses of *The Bacchae* that are most memorable, long and beautiful evocations of life in the woodlands and fields. The theme is the nature of the passions unleashed by religious ecstasy. A mother and her companions are caught up in the rituals of Dionysus so passionately that they prove able to turn on her son and tear him to pieces.

Euripides remained popular. In the Oxyrhynchus papyri he is by far the most widely read of the Athenian tragedians and it is interesting that in the very earliest account that survives of a man reading to himself the text is one of Euripides' plays.

Aristophanes and Comedy

Comedy was an opposite to tragedy—the word itself, a ‘revel’ or ‘riot’, suggests a moment of release. It appears much later than tragedy, in 486 for the Dionysia, 442 for the Lenaea, and the genre is openly contemptuous of its rival. It is now understood that comedy originated in Greek-speaking Sicily—perhaps through the inventive rewriting of the myths of the Trojan War by one Epicharnus who was active even before Aristophanes was born. (See the essays in Kathryn Busher (ed.), *Theater Outside Athens: Drama in Greek Sicily and South Italy*, New York and Cambridge, 2012.) Comedy in Athens was, in fact, an essential element of its democratic system in that the dramatist could ridicule virtually any aspect of life from the gods to contemporary politicians, from philosophers to other dramatists. The outrageous nature of many of Aristophanes’ jibes, at a time when the city was under immense threat from outside, is remarkable and overturns the Periclean image of a city coldly dedicated to patriotic virtue.

Very little is known of Aristophanes (c.450–385 BC) but it is assumed he was Athenian by birth. His attitudes are elitist, and he was ready to taunt anyone who represented new values or a less than cultured lifestyle. Aristophanes was writing at a time when Athens was at war and he yearns for peace, presenting the past as more civilized and noble than the present. It is hard to summarize his political views because his targets were so varied, but he shows some nostalgia for the early days of democracy, a time when he considered that the ‘people’ were wiser than they had since become. He had the aristocrat’s weakness for mocking the background of others. Euripides, for instance, was taunted for being the son of a greengrocer (even though evidence suggests his background was quite a wealthy one). Cleon, the dominant political figure in Athens after the death of Pericles, is portrayed in *The Knights* as a slave to an unsteady and stupid old man, Demos (The People), who is happy only when he is given hand-outs. Euripides is derided for betraying the traditional conventions of tragedy.

The Clouds, a satire on contemporary philosophy, was produced for the first time in 423, a time when Athens was hoping for peace. A dissolute old farmer, Strepsiades, has heard that philosophers can make even a bad case appear good and he is determined to have his son learn how he can do this so as to get his own back on his creditors. Part of the play takes place in a school, the ‘Thinkery’, where students engage in all kinds of meaningless intellectual exercises and where it is taught that Zeus does not exist and it is the clouds instead which produce thunder and rain. ‘These people,’ notes Strepsiades, ‘teach anyone who pays them to win any argument right or wrong.’ Socrates himself appears in a basket examining the clouds. Aristophanes is well attuned to the debates of the sophists but senses their vulnerability. Do intellectuals ever really achieve much? Do they use their brilliance to obfuscate the weakness of their arguments?

The Clouds, like most of Aristophanes’ work was set in contemporary Athens, though Aristophanes’ scripts often quickly translate the action into an unrecognizable world. Perhaps the finest of Aristophanes’ plays is *The Birds*, written at the

anxious time when the Athenian expedition of Sicily (see Chapter 18) was under way but its fate unknown. Aristophanes creates an ideal state, an escapist kingdom of birds halfway between the world of men and that of the gods. The birds are able to cut off the flow of sacrifice to the gods and so force them to accept the primacy of the birds. In *Lysistrata*, the women of Greece launch a sex strike in order to force their men to give up war. In *The Frogs*, the theme is tragedy itself. With Euripides and Sophocles by now both dead, Dionysus has to go down to the underworld to bring back Euripides to keep the Dionysiac festivals going. In fact Aeschylus puts in a counter-claim, and in a debate between him and Euripides it is Aeschylus who wins. He is considered a better guardian of traditional morals—a reflection without any doubt of Aristophanes' own preferences.

These accounts do nothing to show the wit, outrageous double entendres, fantastic characters, and sheer hurly-burly that make up Aristophanes' work, or the lyrical quality of much of his writing. The choruses, whether made up of birds, clouds, wasps, or frogs, dress up in appropriate costumes to add to the colour and hilarity of the performances. In Aristophanes there is a marriage between the most sophisticated wit and the most unbridled vulgarity. No other comedian of the Greek world comes near to equalling it, and it is only recently that producers have felt able to revive his plays with an unexpurgated text.

By the end of the century, however, freethinking on religious matters was less tolerable. Optimism was not possible in an age of plague and military defeat, one which saw the destruction of the Athenian expedition to Sicily in 413 and the defeat of Athens by Sparta in 404. It was natural for conservatives to see these disasters as the revenge of the gods on those who had slighted them. Already, in the 430s, a decree of the Assembly had allowed public prosecution of both those who criticized the practice of religion and those who taught 'rational' theories about the heavens. Protagoras was forced to flee Athens and was drowned on his way to Sicily.

Socrates

As already seen, the central character in *The Clouds* was none other than Athens's most celebrated contemporary philosopher, Socrates. Socrates was born in Athens in 469 and had spent almost all his life in the city, although he seems to have served, bravely the accounts suggest, as a hoplite on occasions in the Peloponnesian War. He played virtually no part in politics, claiming that to have done so would have compromised his principles. He was an isolated, self-centred figure, capable of withdrawing from all human contact (there is one story that he once stood motionless and lost in thought for twenty-four hours) and for this reason vulnerable in a city where public participation was so highly valued. (See now Bettany Hughes's wide-ranging *The Hemlock Cup: Socrates, Athens and the Search for the Good Life*, London and New York, 2011, that provides the background to Socrates' life and ideas.)

Socrates himself wrote nothing and what is known of his ideas is drawn from three sources. The first, Aristophanes' portrayal in *The Clouds*, is probably distorted

by the demands of the comedy, although some have seen its references in the play to Socrates' interests in private religious cults as valid. The historian Xenophon provided some *Memorabilia* which arose from direct personal contact with Socrates and which contain a narrative with some verbatim extracts from Socrates' trial, but by far the most important source, and virtually the only one for Socrates' philosophy, is Plato. Although the range of material is rich and wide-ranging, it too has its limitations. Plato was forty years younger than Socrates and only knew him in the closing years of a long life. Socrates is always allowed to speak directly, but it is often difficult to distinguish between Socrates' own thoughts and those of Plato. (Plato's works are termed 'Dialogues' because Plato records conversations in which Socrates is usually the dominating speaker. They are conventionally divided into three groups, the Early, Middle, and Late Dialogues. Socrates appears in almost every one of the Dialogues but it is assumed that Plato's views predominate in the Middle and Late Dialogues and that Plato has moved away from any historical portrayal of the man himself.)

For Plato Socrates was a hero. He is presented as someone who lives for philosophy itself, searching for the truth without any regard for material gain, in the end dying for his beliefs. These beliefs centre on the human soul and its search for 'the good'. The soul is not just a disembodied spirit, argues Socrates, it is the character of a person, an integral part of his personality. It can be corrupted by the glamour of the world and has to discover for itself that there is something called 'the good' which can be grasped through the use of reason. Once 'the good' has been found the soul will recognize and be naturally attracted to it. In effect Socrates was shifting the attentions of philosophy away from attempts to understand only the physical world towards something very different, individual self-discovery. It is better, he is recorded as saying, to be alone in one's convictions when these are aligned with the fruits of personal reasoning, than simply to be one of the crowd at the expense of one's integrity. This was a new start in the history of philosophy, and in recognition of this all earlier thinkers are conventionally described as 'pre-Socratic'.

The first step to finding 'the good' is to recognize the limitations of one's present life, and this means examining the conventions by which it is lived. ('An unexamined life is not worth living' is perhaps the most famous of Socrates' statements.) In the typical Socratic dialogue, Socrates allows the person he is addressing to express a view, about bravery or friendship, for instance. Socrates then breaks down the statement, showing how one example of friendship is inadequate as a means of understanding the essence of what friendship means.

In one dialogue Socrates talks with the general Laches in an attempt to define bravery:

SOCRATES TO LACHES. I wanted to get your opinion not only of bravery in the hoplite line, but also in cavalry engagements and in all forms of fighting; and indeed of bravery not only in fighting but also at sea, and in the face of illness and poverty and public affairs. And there is bravery not only in face of pain and fear, but also of desire and pleasure, both fearsome to fight against whether by attack or retreat—for some men are brave in all these encounters, aren't they, Laches?

LACHES. Yes, certainly, Socrates. Then all these are examples of bravery, only some men show it in pleasure, some in pain, some in desire, some in danger. And there are others who show cowardice in the same circumstances.

SOCRATES TO LACHES. Now what I want to know was just what each of these two qualities is. So try again and tell me first, what is this common characteristic of courage which they all share? Do you understand now what I mean?

LACHES. I am afraid I don't.

(Translation: Desmond Lee)

Socrates assumes that there is a concept, 'bravery', which is somehow there waiting to be discovered by reason. Discovery would lead to there being real knowledge of what bravery is, at a level beyond that held in the opinions of ordinary men in the sense that the knowledge could be defended rationally. However, in the Dialogues Socrates seldom reaches this point. Socrates even suggests that it is not his job to provide this kind of knowledge. It has to be discovered by the individual for himself. (It could not, therefore, be taught.) In the *Theaetetus* he is recorded as follows: 'I cannot myself give birth to wisdom, and the criticism which has so often been made of me, that though I ask questions of others I have no contribution to make myself because I have no wisdom in me, is quite true.' On another occasion Socrates said that his wisdom lay in the fact that he was the only man who fully realized his own ignorance.

The experience of meeting Socrates must have been both inspiring and frustrating. Here is the portrait given in Plato's *Symposium* by a drunken Alcibiades, the egocentric aristocrat who will reappear later:

When I listen to him, my heart pounds...it's a sort of frenzy...possessed...and the tears stream out of me at what he says. And I can see a lot of other people that he's had just the same effect on. I've heard Pericles, I've heard plenty more good speakers, and I thought they did pretty well, but they never had an effect like this on me. My soul wasn't turned upside down by them and it didn't suffer from the feeling that I'm dirt. But that's the feeling I get from him and I know very well, at this moment, if I were prepared to lend him my ears, I couldn't hold out, he makes me admit that when there's so much I need, I don't look after myself. (Translation: Kenneth Dover)

It was probably inevitable that Socrates would get into trouble in the deeply unsettled times of the late fifth century. In 403 the democrats had just regained the initiative in the city (after the rule of the Thirty Tyrants) and their suspicions of Socrates rested partly on his association with discredited aristocrats such as Alcibiades. Socrates made it quite clear that he regarded popular opinion as something inferior to the reasoned findings of intellectuals. However much he professed that he himself was ignorant, the charge of intellectual elitism was bound to stick. The actual charges of 'corrupting the young' and 'neglect of the gods whom the city worships' brought by a number of his enemies in 399 may have been trumped-up ones but they reflected the uneasiness of a city where communal values continued to be strongly valued and religious sensitivities remained acute. It is certainly possible that Socrates had dabbled in private cults at a time when it was unwise to do so.

At his trial Socrates appears to have been in no mood to compromise and, in Plato's account, the *Apology*, he put his case clearly and consistently but seems only

to have aroused greater anger among his listeners. He simply refused to play according to the conventions, suggesting he had a mission to undermine the misguided thoughts of others and might even be supported by the city (with free meals for life!) for his efforts. The guilty verdict (apparently by 280 votes to 220) did not necessarily mean a death penalty but Socrates' refusal to suggest an alternative eventually made it inevitable. According to Plato, Socrates met his end calmly, sharing his thoughts while the hemlock steadily spread through his body (although death by hemlock was in reality painful). Plato's accounts of his last days (the *Phaedo*) have left one of the most enduring images of western cultural and political history. The issues involved, community versus the individual, 'truth' and knowledge versus popular opinion, continue to haunt, and, it is fair to say, honour, his memory.

Plato

The problem left by Socrates was whether the concepts he was discussing—bravery, goodness, friendship, beauty among them—could ever be defined to the satisfaction of all. This challenge was taken up by his admirer Plato (429–347). Plato's background was aristocratic. It is unfair to suggest that this alone conditioned his philosophy, but he remained thoroughly unconvinced by his experience of democracy, especially as in his youth democratic rule was associated with the humiliation of his native Athens at the hands of Sparta. The trial of Socrates appears to have marked a turning point for him. Democracy for Plato was synonymous with mob rule, with decisions taken for purely emotional or mercenary motives. Furthermore, the practice of democracy implied that moral and political values were relative, subject to the atmosphere of the moment. Plato was convinced that a better foundation could be found for knowledge if absolutes, of justice and goodness, for instance, could be established, against which any specific policy could be judged. The problem lay in defining where these absolutes might exist and how they could be approached by the human mind. (See David Melling, *Understanding Plato*, Oxford and New York, 1987, as an introduction.)

A solution is explored in a famous passage in a 'Middle' Dialogue, *Meno*, where Socrates guides a slave boy, a symbol of someone with no formal learning, through a geometrical proof concerning the area of a square (a proof to show that when the length of a square's sides are doubled it quadruples in area). The slave is led inexorably onwards by Socrates through the argument towards an inevitable conclusion. The point Socrates/Plato wants to make is that the truths about the area of the square exist eternally. Each soul (Plato believed that the soul existed eternally) in fact once knew them, and the process which the slave boy has been taken through is primarily one of *recollection* of what has been forgotten.

Plato goes on to argue that it is not only mathematical proofs that exist to be 'recollected' in this way. Many other concepts—beauty, bravery, goodness, for instance—exist as eternal entities available to be comprehended through reason. The term Plato uses is normally translated as Form or Idea—the Form of Beauty or

Bravery, for instance. Each Form can only be grasped after a long period of reflection on its nature (going through a process such as Socrates followed, meditating on every aspect of the Form chosen until its essence is defined). The Forms exist as a hierarchy, with some easier to grasp than others and with the Form of 'the good' at the apex. In his famous analogy of the prisoners in the cave (from *The Republic*), Plato has his freed prisoners first being able to see reflections of objects in water, then the objects themselves, then the stars, and finally the sun ('the good') as they progress in the use of rational thought.

The goal of the philosopher is, therefore, to understand the Forms. As the Forms are entities that exist completely independently of the human mind, they are in fact an enduring 'reality' in contrast to the transient world perceived by the senses; those few who do understand them correctly must agree on what they consist of. The Form of 'the good' will mean exactly the same to all those whose reason penetrates its meaning. Plato has moved on from Socrates' view that the goal of life is self-discovery. The Forms exist beyond the individual, and any knowledge an individual thinks he has which does not conform to a Form is by definition flawed. ('We shall approach astronomy, as we do geometry, by way of problems, *and ignore what is in the sky* [my italics], if we are to get a real grasp of astronomy,' Plato wrote in *The Republic*.)

There are many questions about the Forms that Plato leaves unresolved. This is partly because the concept is used in several different Dialogues, in a variety of contexts and to deal with different problems. Most of the Forms Plato mentions are 'good' ones, Beauty, Courage, and so on. He does not state whether there are Forms of Ugliness, Cowardice, and Evil. (In his so-called *Seventh Letter* Plato suggests that there might be Forms 'of shapes and surfaces, of the good, the beautiful, the just, of all bodies natural and artificial, of fire and water and the like, of every animal, of every quality of character, of all actions and passivities'.) Nor is it clear whether there can be Forms of physical objects, such as beds or tables. Can there be a perfect table that contains the features of all other tables in some ideal form? Some concepts are difficult to imagine as Forms, Largeness, for instance. Could a Form of Largeness be anything more than something of infinite size? Some scholars even argue that Plato came to realize that these problems were insoluble and in his later work abandoned the idea of Forms altogether. However, it is lack of dogmatism that is also one of his main attractions. In the longer dialogues such as *Gorgias*, the characters are given every chance to set out their opinions even if they eventually prove vulnerable to the relentless questioning of Socrates.

In the best known of his Middle Dialogues, *The Republic*, Plato goes on to show how understanding of the Forms can be used to construct an ideal state. He starts from the premiss that the happiness of the individual is dependent on the happiness of the *polis*. The individual, in other words, is seen as incapable of having true happiness in his own right but only as a member of a wider community. The purpose of the community is to embody key concepts of good government such as justice and goodness. These can only be based on an understanding of the Forms. However, since only a few individuals have the intellectual ability and leisure to grasp

the Forms, government must be given to them alone. Plato is turning his back on democracy, which he famously described as like a ship without a captain, and arguing for some form of rule by an elite instead.

Where did this leave the rest of the population? Plato divided them into classes, by analogy with the concept he held of the soul. For Plato, as for Socrates, the soul was something eternal existing on a different plane from the body. It had three elements: the capacity for reason, its spirit (the force which motivated it), and appetites. (The problem of whether the soul or mind can be split in this sense, a concept central to the work of Freud, continues as a major issue in philosophy.) For anyone seeking to grasp the nature of the Forms, the power of reason should gradually come to predominate over spirit and appetite. Society could similarly be divided into men of reason, the philosophers, men of spirit, to whom was given the role of soldiers, and the rest, those, prey to their appetites, who remained at the level of labourers. In the *Phaedo* Plato speaks scornfully of 'the lovers of spectacles and sounds, who delight in fine voices and colours and shapes...but their minds are incapable of seeing and delighting in the nature of the Beautiful itself'.

Philosophers-to-be, who could be men or women, were to be selected at an early age from those of spirit. They were first to be put through a regime of physical training and instruction in the arts to mould their character. Mathematics came next, and later a training in dialectics so that a young philosopher would be able to defend the Forms to others once he or she had grasped them. The process was a long one. Not until the age of 30 would the trainees be allowed to serve the state, and the peak of understanding of the Forms would not be reached before the age of 50.

Plato said relatively little in *The Republic* about the nature of the state that would finally emerge. It would appear to be joyless and authoritarian. Good government must not be swayed by emotion, so poetry and music are forbidden. Children are to be held in common. Sex life is to be limited, with an emphasis on eugenic breeding. The rulers must expect no gain from their position other than the satisfaction they obtain from establishing and enforcing truth. Politics, in the sense of debates between different power groups over the direction of the state, simply have no relevance (since once the Forms of Justice or Bravery, for instance, have been grasped there can be no further argument about their nature).

Plato's republic was an ideal. It seemed very far from any possible actual state, as Plato found to his cost on the only occasion he intervened in politics. He had travelled to Sicily about 388, possibly to learn more about Pythagoras from the Pythagorean communities that still existed in southern Italy. (The idea of a philosophical community fascinated Plato and inspired his own Academy in Athens.) He had met and was deeply attracted to Dion, the brother-in-law of the ruler of Syracuse, Dionysius. Dion absorbed Plato's philosophy, and some twenty years later when Dionysius' son, Dionysius II, succeeded as ruler as a young man, Dion plotted to mould him into a philosopher king on the Platonic model. Plato, now in his sixties, returned to Sicily, but Dionysius was not prepared to play along with his ideals and both Dion and Plato were forced to flee. In one of his last works, *The Laws*, Plato finally sets out a constitution. Many of its requirements are severe: strict chastity,

constant supervision of children, a ban on all homosexuality. It reflects Plato's continuing pessimism about human nature, one doubtless reinforced by his experiences in Sicily. Yet the art of politics remained at the core of Plato's teachings. He played very little part in Athenian politics but many of his followers were called on as consultants by other city-states.

Western philosophy, wrote the mathematician and philosopher Alfred Whitehead, 'consists of a series of footnotes to Plato'. Certainly Plato's legacy is a profound one. His later biographers talked of him as 'a teacher of divine wisdom', even that he was honoured among the gods after his death (some myths suggest that he was divinely conceived!). All those who believe that there is a reality beyond the physical world that embodies value, a view which entered Christianity via the Neoplatonists and St Augustine (see pp. 598 and 623), fall within the Platonic tradition. Those who do not see any evidence of such a reality fall outside it. It is a crucial divide and it also mirrors the divide between those who accept the possibility of moral absolutes and those who do not.

The legacy of Plato in Christian theology has been especially important. As will be seen, Platonism remained the most influential philosophy in the early Christian centuries and was there at hand as Christian theology developed. Once truths about the Christian faith were consolidated in the fourth century they were assumed to be, like Plato's Forms, unchallengeable. Plato's theory of the soul in which the reasoning part of the soul was under continual threat from the more sensual parts underpinned asceticism and even opulent church building was justified on the grounds that it gave an image on earth of what 'true' beauty might be in the world beyond.

The legacy of Plato so far as political thought is concerned is, inevitably, controversial, 'What is our ultimate aim? The peaceful enjoyment of liberty and equality; the reign of eternal justice, whose laws are engraved, not in marble or stone, but in the hearts of all men, even in that of the slave who forgets them [compare *Meno*] and of the tyrant who rejects them.' This statement appears to be set well in the Platonic tradition. It is, in fact, a speech of Maximilien Robespierre made at the height of the French Revolution, a speech which goes on to justify terror against all those who oppose the establishment of a Republic of Virtue. As Karl Popper has argued in his influential *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Plato represents a direct threat to the democratic tradition, and any ruling elite that claims that it has the right to impose its own ideals on society is his heir.

This is perhaps too harsh. Certainly Platonism can lead to dictatorship, but it can also lead to a critique of dictatorship. In a state where the majority support genocide in the name, for instance, of establishing racial purity, how are alternative values to be developed and justified other than through a rational understanding of abstract concepts such as justice and human rights? Are there not fundamental values that need to be preserved against the momentary enthusiasm of popular assemblies? (The US Constitution with its enshrined Bill of Rights accepts that there are.) In education, does a disciplined introduction to effective ways of thinking achieve more than one based on undirected creative thought? It would be arrogant,

and naive, to believe that liberal democracy has solved all the problems of human existence, and to that extent Plato deserves his continuing influence in political and moral thought. It is also important to remember that he established a method of argument, the dialectic.

One of the enduring legacies of Plato was his Academy. It took its name from a nearby grove dedicated to a hero Academus (now replanted in a suburb of Athens), and Plato founded it after his return from his first visit to Sicily in the 380s. It was always a rather exclusive club, but was open to young men from throughout the Greek world, who, presumably, had to show some aptitude and commitment to philosophy before they were accepted as students. In 367 an 18-year-old from Stageira in Macedonia arrived to participate in the Academy's studies. He was the son of a doctor and had probably already picked up some medical skills of observation and possibly dissection. He also appears to have had some wealth, presumably from family land, and anecdotes suggest that despite being fragile in appearance he enjoyed dressing well. His name, one of the most celebrated in the history of science and philosophy, was Aristotle. (See Jonathan Barnes, *Aristotle: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford and New York, 2001; Jonathan Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*, Cambridge and New York, 1988; and Jonathan Barnes (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, Cambridge and New York, 1995. Geoffrey Lloyd has also written extensively about Aristotle, e.g. *Aristotelian Explorations*, Cambridge and New York, 1996.)

Aristotle

Aristotle was to stay with Plato for twenty years, although virtually nothing of this period survives in his work. It is assumed that he absorbed many of the Platonic ideals, and he never lost the belief that rational thought was the supreme intellectual activity. However, his mind was too vigorous and wide-ranging ever to be confined to mere discipleship. His instincts were different from Plato's. While Plato was always concerned with what could be discovered beyond physical reality, Aristotle was fascinated by what could actually be seen in the real world, especially what could be learnt from observation. Raphael's fresco *The School of Athens* (AD 1510–11) in the Vatican shows the contrast well. Plato is depicted looking heavenwards, Aristotle with his eyes towards the ground.

While Plato's works are engaging and easy to read and the issues are easily grasped, Aristotle's are more complex. They may have originated as lecture notes and these were preserved in a library in Athens that was then taken to Rome as loot in the 80s BC. Here a Greek philosopher from Rhodes, Andronicus, brought them together, edited them, and the result was the forty major works that survive today. Andronicus placed the treatise on the major problems of existence after, Greek *meta*, the volume of physics and so we still use the term 'metaphysics' today. Yet Aristotle always needed further explanatory commentaries, some of these, especially those of the Arab world, major works of philosophy in their own right.

Aristotle left Athens in 347, possibly after he had become dissatisfied with the teachings of the Platonic school. He spent some years teaching and researching along the Ionian coast before being summoned back by Philip of Macedon to tutor Philip's 13-year-old son, Alexander. The relationship between two of the most formidable men of the fourth century seems to have left no lasting impact on either of them. After three years Aristotle returned to his native town, Stageira, and from there, in 335, he returned to Athens. Here he founded his own school, the Lyceum. It can be seen as the world's first research institute, and the range and quality of its scientific work was only to be challenged in the ancient world by the schools of Alexandria. In 323 another outburst of anti-Macedonian feeling on the death of Alexander forced Aristotle out of Athens to Euboea, and here he died in 322, aged 62.

The range of Aristotle's work is extraordinary. While he is remembered above all for his contribution to logic and his founding of zoology as a discipline, his surviving texts cover almost every aspect of knowledge. There are works on language, the arts, ethics, politics, and law. In the sciences he wrote on zoology, biology, astronomy, chemistry, and physics. He grappled with the major philosophical problems of change and causation, time, space, and continuity. In addition to his system of logic, he ranged over metaphysics and the theory of knowledge. He clarified and defined different areas of knowledge, separating the theoretical such as mathematics and metaphysics, whose main purpose was to find truth, from the practical, ethics and politics, and the productive, those concerned with making things.

One of Aristotle's most attractive qualities was that he saw himself as part of a continuing intellectual tradition. When dealing with a particular issue he first brought together all previous contributions on the subject (this is why so much of the ideas of the pre-Socratics has survived) and concentrated on the problems they left unsolved. In contrast to Plato he did not try to fit solutions into some general preconceived framework but worried away at them as he found them, never assuming there were easy answers. (In his *Aristotelian Explorations*, chapter 3, 'Fuzzy Natures', Geoffrey Lloyd shows the ingenuity and open-mindedness Aristotle brought to such problems as finding a distinction between plants and animals when presented with sponges, jellyfish, sea anemones, and razor shells!) He also appears to be more sympathetic to public opinion. As a result there is often something provisional and speculative about his surviving works which makes them harder to read and understand than Plato's.

Reasoning had been an essential part of early Greek philosophy. In the hands of Parmenides and Plato it had been elevated to the supreme way of finding the truth. However, there had been no systematic thought on what makes a valid argument and, without this, progress in mathematics and science in particular would always be restricted. It was one of Aristotle's greatest achievements that he penetrated the problem and produced a system of logic that was to last unchallenged for almost 2,000 years. Its beauty and its authority lay in its simplicity.

First, Aristotle argued that the foundations of knowledge depend on propositions, statements on which all can agree. A proposition is made up of a subject, say

'cats', and a predicate that says something about the subject, say 'four feet'. The proposition then reads 'Cats have four feet'. There are other possibilities: 'No cats have five feet', 'Some cats are black', 'Some cats are not black'. Aristotle argued that almost every statement can be broken down into simple propositions such as this. (Later philosophers have found this too simplistic an approach.)

Once these propositions have been sorted out, they can be generalized by replacing the subject and predicate by letters: 'All As are B' or 'Some Cs are D', for instance. These propositions can then be used in a wide variety of situations, whichever the philosopher wants to work with. The next step, taken in Aristotle's *Prior Analytics*, is to examine how propositions can be used as the basis for deductions. One has to start with two propositions. Take 'A is a B' and 'All Bs are C'. It follows logically that A is a C. (To put in an actual example: 'Socrates is a man. All men are mortal. Thus Socrates is mortal.') This is an example of what Aristotle called a syllogism. 'A *sullogismus*', he wrote, 'is an argument in which certain things being assumed, something different from the things assumed follows from necessity by the fact that they hold.' In the *Prior Analytics* Aristotle went on to look at the instances where logical deductions cannot be made. ('A cat has four feet. A dog has four feet. Therefore a dog is a cat' does not follow logically, for instance, and the student in elementary logic has to sort out why.)

Aristotle's contributions in zoology were also to last over 2,000 years. Most of the fieldwork for his *Zoological Researches* was done while he was in Asia. It was a momentous work, bringing together observations of animals as varied as hyenas, elephants, sheep, and mice. Close examination was supplemented by dissection. When Aristotle wanted to understand the evolution of a chick embryo, he found a hen's clutch and then removed an egg each day, comparing the difference in the development of each. Sometimes Aristotle made mistakes, at other times he relied on inaccurate hearsay, but as a total enterprise the *Researches* is formidable. It remains, however, a compilation of material. Aristotle never created his own experiments to further his understanding of animals. He believed that the essence of an animal could only be grasped if it were seen in its natural habitat.

Aristotle was, in fact, primarily an empiricist. He liked collecting and interpreting facts about the physical world as it existed and could be seen around him. He asked what could actually be said about a physical object. Taking a chair, for instance, what exactly is it? Aristotle said that a proper analysis would not only consider what it was made of (wood, perhaps) and what particular shape it had to take to be classified as a chair, but who made it and what its purpose was. He distinguished between the essential attributes of a chair (without which it could not be a chair) and incidental qualities such as the colour it was painted. Here again he broke with Plato. Suppose the chair was painted white. For Plato whiteness might be a Form, existing eternally. Aristotle took a more down-to-earth view. Whiteness was a quality of a particular chair and it did not exist as something independent of that chair. It depended on the chair for its being. (Similarly the soul was an intrinsic part of the human being, as embedded in it as the impression a stamp has made on a piece of wax. This was in contrast to Plato's view that the soul was like a sailor on

a ship; they worked together but one could be withdrawn from the other without the essence of either being destroyed.)

As this example suggests, Aristotle always went beyond mere observation. He does not just describe a chair, he is interested in the philosophical problems surrounding it in its existence as a chair. How, for instance, could a chair change into something else and what is the process involved? Is the capacity for change inherent in an object or does it need some outside force to initiate it? What is the cause of the chair being a chair? When looking at living animals he was fascinated by the problem of why they had the physical attributes they did. Why does a duck have webbed feet? Aristotle argued that it was because it had a role, that of being a duck, and the webbed feet were essential to fulfilling this role. The most important attribute of a human being was his ability to think rationally and so the highest state of being human was to develop this faculty to its fullest extent. Aristotle seems to be suggesting that there is an underlying purpose to nature, that of the self-fulfilment of every living being through the correct use of the attributes it possesses, *eudaimonia*.

It was inevitable that Aristotle would have a great deal to say about the particular nature of man and his role on earth, and he made important studies both in ethics and politics. As has been suggested above, Aristotle saw the development of reason as the supreme goal of human existence. However, unlike Plato, Aristotle never establishes precisely how reason is to be used. In some way it was associated with the achievement of moral excellence, but in his *Ethics* Aristotle argues that goodness cannot be achieved through reason alone. Rather a person becomes good by the disposition of goodness being trained into him as a child. Once this disposition has been gained and a person grows up orientated towards doing good, then the everyday doing of good depends on circumstances around him. Here reasoning appears to play a part in establishing the situations in which good actions are appropriate. The end result is a character that achieves goodness within a rationally integrated framework of ethical behaviour. The highest state that all human beings should aim for is *eudaimonia*, based on exercising one's reasoning to its fullest extent in the pursuit of moral excellence.

It is not enough for each individual to take on the search alone. 'Man', said Aristotle, in one of his more famous statements, 'is a social animal' (or 'political animal' as the phrase is often translated). One aspect of *eudaimonia* lies in living in harmony with those around one. Aristotle the empiricist was well aware of the political problems of the Greek city-states. He compiled an account, now lost, of 158 different constitutions, for instance. Insofar as he favoured one form of government it was democracy, but only in the restricted sense of government being open on equal terms to those with wealth and property. Aristotle shared the traditional contempt of the Greek for manual labour and trade, and those who indulged in them would have no part to play in government. He had no interest in the rights of women and defended slavery (see the quotation on p. 228). The goal was to establish *eudaimonia* for the city and this was to be achieved through the power of the state with a particular focus on the education of the young. 'We should not think', writes

Aristotle, 'that each of the citizens belongs to himself, rather that they all belong to the State'; and again, in the *Politics*, 'whatever the majority [of the participating citizens] decides is final and constitutes justice'. There is no room here for human rights in the modern sense of the term.

As Aristotle's views on women and slaves show, he was in many ways a creature of his time. His views were conventional in other ways. He followed Empedocles in believing that the physical world was made up of four elements, fire, water, earth, and air, something he could never have established if he had relied on his own observations. (Aristotle did, however, modify Empedocles' views by suggesting that each element was affected by opposites of hot and cold and dry and wet contained within it.) He adopted the conventional view that the earth was the centre of the universe. As Geoffrey Lloyd has argued, he often started with a hypothesis and then shaped observations to prove it. Aristotle was not a truly original thinker in the sense of digging down to bedrock and building from there. However, the scale of his work was prodigious. He initiated the first enquiry into the natural sciences that ranged over the whole spectrum of the physical world. Even when he did not provide clear answers he was never afraid to pose the key questions about the existence and purpose of matter.

Aristotle's approach to empirical observation bore fruit in other thinkers, notably Theophrastus, his successor as head of the Lyceum, who was ready to question even his teacher's findings. Theophrastus is known for his *Enquiry into Plants* and *On the Causes of Plants* that were so extensive and searching—they include the first system of classifying plants—that they have earned Theophrastus the title of 'father of botany'. In the same tradition, the Cilician Dioscorides (active in the first century AD) accumulated a vast amount of material on the effects of plants on varied illnesses. *De Materia Medica*, in its Latin translation, survived as a medical handbook through the Middle Ages and its cures were only challenged for the first time in the sixteenth century. Even then Theophrastus and Dioscorides were lauded as the founders of natural history and are found gracing the frontispieces of many a herbal.

Despite these developments, Aristotle's influence as an individual was, at first, surprisingly limited and he does not feature strongly among the Hellenistic philosophers even though many of these, such as Dioscorides, were following approaches he had pioneered. By late antiquity, Plato's more abstract philosophy fitted better with the times and the Christian leaders criticized Aristotle for his focus on the natural world at the expense of the eternal one in the heavens. It was the Arabs who rediscovered him and responded to his genius and through their translations he passed into the west. Between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries his scientific work dominated medieval Europe, largely through the translations of his works into Latin from the Arabic and their championing within the Roman Catholic tradition by Thomas Aquinas (see further below, p. 674).

By 330 BC, therefore, the Greeks had undertaken a revolution in ways of thinking. It is still easy to underestimate the revolutionary nature of what they had done. In his *The Unnatural Nature of Science* (London, 1992; Cambridge, Mass., 1994), Lewis

Wolpert has convincingly argued that there is nothing obvious about looking at the world in a scientific way. All the incentives are to try and make the world work on a day-to-day basis without speculating on its wider nature. It required a particularly combative form of mind to break through the limits of conventional thinking. Whether born in the law courts, the assemblies, or elsewhere, this is what the Greeks provided.

It is sometimes argued that the Greeks introduced rational ways of thinking which deadened the natural senses, depriving human beings of access to their emotions. This chapter has shown that in Athens at least this was not so. Plato may have insisted on the importance of reason, but in the same period the playwright Euripides was exploring the forces of unreason in his play *The Bacchae*. The achievements of the Greeks lay in making brilliant contributions to the understanding of both the rational and irrational aspects of human consciousness. (The Greeks themselves distinguished *logoi* (singular *logos*), rational accounts written in prose, from *mythoi*, stories, myths, and legends which were not intended to express rational truth and which were normally expressed in verse.) It is doubtful whether these breakthroughs could have taken place in a city that did not enjoy the combative and competitive atmosphere of fifth- and fourth-century Athens.

The western intellectual tradition could be said to be founded on the dual legacy of Plato and Aristotle. As Richard Tarnas puts it in his *The Passion of the Western Mind* (New York, 1991; London, 1996):

The constant interplay of these two partly complementary and partly antithetical sets of principles [Platonism and Aristotelianism] established a profound inner tension within the Greek inheritance, which provided the Western mind with the intellectual basis, at once unstable and highly creative, for what was to become an extremely dynamic evolution lasting over two and a half millennia. The secular scepticism of the one stream and the metaphysical idealism of the other provided a crucial counterbalance to each other, each undermining the other's tendency to crystallise into dogmatism, yet the two in combination eliciting new and fertile intellectual possibilities.

INTERLUDE 4

Rhetoric

Homer's heroes not only had to fight well, they had to speak well. It was the mark of the leader that he could persuade his followers to fight for him but, as Homer's own epics show, the art of the spoken word with its capacity not only to motivate but to entertain and enthuse ran deep in Greek society. Rhetoric, the art of public speaking, was intrinsic to Greek and, later, Roman political and intellectual life.

As the Greek city-states established their own assemblies new contexts for public speaking emerged. There were not only the political debates (the setting for the deliberative speech): as has been seen the law courts offered the chance for political struggles to be played out through charging and defending individuals for assumed crimes against the state. This was the forensic speech recognized as a different genre from the deliberative. Here there were juries to persuade. Then there were the more formal speeches—the most famous of which is Pericles' Funeral Speech in Athens in 431–430 (as re-created by Thucydides) in which he expounds the greatness of Athens (see earlier, p. 268). In the city festivals there are competitive speeches, some of them involving the recitation of set texts such as Homer's epics. In his exhaustive studies of the origins of Greek science, Geoffrey Lloyd sees the struggle between speakers to persuade as fostering the growth of rational argument (earlier p. 193). Plato made the point that a written text could not answer back; an active debate using the interplay of the spoken word is more productive.

It is clear that even in democratic Athens, 'aristocrats' such as Pericles could still use their status as a means of getting heard, but increasingly speaking could be seen as a skill to be learned. It was the Sicilian orator Gorgias, who arrived in Athens in 327 to plead the case of his native city Leontini, who showed the Athenians how an audience could be manipulated. 'Give me a theme', he called as he entered the theatre, and then would argue whatever case was suggested to him. He understood how the spoken word had an emotional power beyond its meaning and could be exploited to this end. As he put it in the speech he made on Helen of Troy: 'The power of a speech has the same relationship to the order of the soul as the order of drugs had to the nature of bodies. For just as different drugs expel different humours from the body and some put a stop to illness, others to life, so too some speeches cause pain, some pleasure, some fear, some induce confidence in the listeners, some drug and bewitch the soul with a certain bad persuasion.' This, however, was the problem. As the debates in the Athenian assembly over the treatment

of Mytilene (427) or the generals accused of letting sailors drown after a battle (406) showed, assemblies were susceptible to emotional manipulation by 'skilled' or unscrupulous speakers. In his play *The Clouds*, Aristophanes sets up a debate between 'Just Speech' and 'Unjust Speech' in which the latter triumphs through verbal trickery.

So while rhetoric became, and remained for centuries, one of the most important parts of the curriculum, the Greeks recognized that it presented moral and philosophical challenges. In his description of the Mytilene Debate in his *The Peloponnesian War*, the historian Thucydides uses a speech by one Diodotus to stress the importance of thoughtful speaking:

Haste and anger are, to my mind, the two greatest obstacles to wise counsel—haste, that usually goes with folly, anger, that is the mark of primitive and narrow minds. And anyone who maintains that words cannot be a guide to action must be either a fool or one with some personal interest at stake: he is a fool if he imagines that it is possible to deal with the uncertainties of the future by any other medium, and he is personally interested if his aim is to persuade you into some disgraceful action, and knowing that he cannot make a good speech in a bad cause, he tries to frighten his opponents and his hearers by some good-sized pieces of misrepresentation... the good citizen, instead of trying to terrify the opposition, ought to prove his case in fair argument; and a wise state, without giving special honours to its best counsellors, will certainly not deprive them of the honour they already enjoy; and when a man's advice is not taken, he should not even be disgraced, far less penalised. (Translation: Rex Warner)

The most influential teacher of the early fourth century, Isocrates, stressed the importance of a speaker's moral integrity. The speaker has a duty not only to develop his own character, so that he has the respect of his audience, but an understanding of the issues that he talks about:

One who wishes to persuade others will not be negligent of his own virtue but will pay special attention to it that he may get the finest reputation among his fellow citizens. Who does not know that words seem more true when spoken by those who lead good lives than by those whose lives have been criticised and that proofs based on a person's life have greater power than those provided by speech? The stronger a person desires to persuade hearers, the more he will work to be honourable and good and to have a good reputation among the citizens.... Oratory is good only if it has the quality of fitness for the occasion, propriety of style and innovative treatment.

So rhetoric is not only a practical skill, it is the expression of the educated mind at its best. This was not enough for Isocrates' contemporary Plato. In his dialogue *Gorgias*, in which, not surprisingly, Gorgias is resurrected to play a key role, rhetoric is denounced as a mere knack, in which truth is manipulated through the emotional force of oratory. It was left to Aristotle to produce what became the most famous work on the subject, *Rhetoric*. Aristotle was an orator himself so he is able to provide practical hints but he is more interested in the specific way in which rhetoric acts to persuade. 'There are three kinds of persuasive means furnished by the *logos*, those in the character of the speaker, those in how the speaker is disposed, and those in the *logos* itself, through its demonstrating or seeming to demonstrate.' One must not only learn how to speak, but reflect on what it means to speak well.

As regards style, it is the speaker's duty to be clear, fitting to the occasion and not over ornate.

Rhetoric is, inevitably, shaped by the contexts in which it is needed and Athens provided the stimulus for some of the greatest orators of all time, among them Demosthenes, whose career will be outlined later. Demosthenes, however, provides a reminder of just how difficult a practical art effective rhetoric was. His early attempts at public speaking ended in humiliation and he had to train himself through placing pebbles in his mouth to achieve his clear diction. Yet rhetoric could persuade and inspire. At the end of his long life Isocrates himself was credited, in a speech addressed to Philip of Macedon, with providing the inspiration for the spread of Greek culture as a civilizing force for Asia.

If democracies need persuasive speakers, monarchies foster the formal panegyric, the speech of welcome or praise to a ruler that often takes a highly ritualized form. These emerge in the Hellenistic period. In republican Rome, on the other hand, there was once again an electorate to be swayed or, in the law courts, a jury to be convinced. Cicero was the master of Roman rhetoric, the first Roman to achieve political office on his skills as an orator rather than as a soldier. His *Philippics* (44–43 BC) are the last great set of deliberative speeches before the coming of the empire eclipses political oratory.

This does not mean that the skill of public speaking disappears. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, a Greek living in Rome in the second half of the first century BC, revived the memory of the great orators of the fourth century especially Isocrates and Demosthenes and lamented the decay that had taken place since then. Rhetoric became a standard part of traditional education and its continuing value was the theme of Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* (c. AD 95), a work which maintained its influence not only in the Roman empire but when classical learning was revived during the Renaissance. By the second century AD, rhetoric reappears among the Greeks as part of the revival of their traditional cultural skills, but also with the specific aim of representing cities before the emperor in the hope of gaining his patronage. (For this Second Sophistic see below, p. 543.) One of the most influential teachers from a later period was Menander of Laodicea (possibly the beginning of the fourth century) who laid out the conventions for a wide variety of speeches, including the correct way to address a city or an emperor (the panegyric). Yet another context was the sermon, which, in the mouths of a master such as Ambrose of Milan or John Chrysostom in the late fourth century, became a major tool in the creation of a Christian society. Augustine himself, it is often forgotten, was the city orator in Milan before his conversion. (See further Erik Gunderson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Rhetoric*, Cambridge and New York, 2009 and George Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric*, Princeton and London, 1994.)

Sparta had viewed the consolidation of the Athenian empire with some unease. Without a navy of her own there was nothing she could do to confront Athens and so she had to stand by in frustration when Pericles subdued the rebellious island of Samos in 440. What shifted the balance of power was a series of events that drove Corinth towards Sparta. Corinth had been in dispute with her former colony Corcyra (the island of Corfu), and Athens had come to Corcyra's support. Her motive may have been to prevent Corcyra's large fleet from joining Corinth's or she may have had her eye on another base in the western Mediterranean. In 432 another dispute broke out in the northern Aegean, over the city of Potidaea, a colony of Corinth on the peninsula of Chalcidice, but also a subject member of the Athenian empire. Athens had tried to rid Potidaea of her Corinthian magistrates, but only succeeded in sparking off a revolt that forced her to retaliate with an expensive siege. Corinth had had enough. Why, her envoys taunted Sparta, was she so slothful when Athens was so energetic in her ambitions?

This time Sparta responded. It seemed an opportune time to strike at Athens. Sparta could rely on the support of Corinth just at a time when an Athenian army of 3,000 hoplites was absent at Potidaea. Megara, which seems to have been under some form of trade ban from Athens, was eager to offer help. The outbreak of war was engineered by Sparta when she encouraged one of her allies, Thebes, to attack Plataea, an ally of Athens. The way was open for Spartan forces to make a lightning raid across the Isthmus in the hope of seizing Athens. So war broke out. The Spartans realized that they deserved the guilt for initiating the war, and when things went badly they were haunted by the belief that the gods were punishing them for their transgressions.

Technically, this was the Second Peloponnesian War—the First covers the fighting in the 450s and early 440s—and even this is somewhat of a misnomer as there were two distinct periods of war between 431 and 404 with a pause at the Peace of Nicias in 421. The fundamental problem of the war was how a naval power such as Athens could defeat land-locked Sparta and how Sparta, with no effective navy, could hope to capture the well-defended Athens. The first years of the war were marked by a series of ineffective raids on each other's territories. Spartan troops ravaged Attica almost every year (but could never actually storm the city itself, which, protected by its Long Walls, maintained open access to the sea for supplies). Athens launched raids on the Peloponnesian coast and one on Megara, as an ally of

Sparta's. Her hope was perhaps to stimulate the helots into revolt and destabilize Sparta's alliances. It was because the Athenians knew that the best response to the Spartan incursion on her territory was to withdraw behind the Long Walls and endure the ravaging of crops that so many people became shut up in the city, with the result that when plague broke out in 431, it spread with frightening speed. (The classic introduction to the war is Donald Kagan, *The Peloponnesian War*, New York, 2003, an abridgement of his four-volume history.)

Thucydides

The full horror of the plague is detailed by the historian Thucydides (c.460–c.399). His account is a classic in the early history of medicine with details of the symptoms, the sufferings, and the psychological collapse of those who caught the disease and knew they could not be saved. Society itself broke down and even the normal religious rituals were discarded. Always agnostic in temperament, Thucydides noted how those who followed them were as likely to suffer as those who did not. Pericles even lost his position as general and was fined for 'deceiving' the people. Re-elected he nevertheless succumbed to illness in 429. So, with this harrowing account, Thucydides embarks on his magnificent history, one of the great intellectual achievements of the fifth century. (See Robert Strassler (ed.), *Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, New York, 1996. A recent critical study is Donald Kagan, *Thucydides and the Reinvention of History*, New York, 2009; London, 2010.)

Thucydides was born in Athens but his father's name suggests the family was Thracian in origin. He served in the war, but when, as a commanding general, he failed to save the important Athenian outpost at Amphipolis from capture by Sparta he was exiled. This gave him the opportunity to visit Sparta and to collect the material for his history while the war was still being fought. He completed the story to 411, dying himself some time after 404. The bulk of his book is therefore a documentary account rather than a history.

Thucydides writes vividly. Many of his descriptions of the war haunt the reader. (I can still remember, as a halting Greek scholar aged 14, the impact of my first reading of his description of the Sicilian expedition.) His account is so detailed and seemingly authoritative compared to any other that exists that it has set the image of the war for every later generation. Thucydides prides himself on his accuracy, deriding those such as the 'poetic' Herodotus for their loose use of evidence. He tries to set out the chronology of the war year by year, in what is almost a scientific way, and with the expressed ambition to provide a narrative that would last. It is only recently that there has been serious critical analysis of Thucydides' approach (whether, for instance, his description of Pericles is not too flattering and that of Cleon too harsh, and whether the expedition to Sicily was quite such a turning point as he suggests—see Kagan on Thucydides, above). He shows no interest in the wider cultural and social background of the antagonists nor in the underlying

economic realities that conditioned their reactions. Nevertheless, no account of the war at all would be possible without his record and it will continue to dominate the source material for the period as well as providing a compulsive read.

No historian, however detached, works without an ideological framework. Thucydides is very much a man of the fifth century. Man is the ‘measure of all things’, and the gods play no direct part in Thucydides’ understanding of how the war happened and the course it followed. He takes it upon himself to penetrate the causes of the war and find the different levels at which antagonism between states was fostered. It is this fascination with the motivations of men, their fears, and the factors that shape decision-making that makes his work so much more than mere narrative.

Thucydides has no illusions about human behaviour. He describes in vivid detail the appalling cruelty with which men can act when under stress. There is little in the history of the twentieth century that would have surprised him. He is particularly adept at pinpointing how words are manipulated by those in power. In the famous debate he reports between the people of Melos, whom Athens was trying to force into her empire, and the Athenians, in Book V of his *History*, he shows how the Athenians ruthlessly exploit their superior strength. ‘You know as well as we do,’ say the Athenian representatives to the hapless Melians, ‘that when these matters are discussed by practical people, the standard of justice depends on the equality of power to compel and that in fact the strong do what they have to do and the weak accept what they have to accept.’ Reality, suggests Thucydides, is structured by those who have power, an idea with enormous implications for philosophers and social scientists.

Thucydides’ detached analysis of the war does not mean that he takes no moral stance. The famous Funeral Oration of Pericles, which extols the self-confidence of the Athenian state, is presented alongside his account of the plague, as if to suggest the fragility of its supremacy. Thucydides worries away at the arguments for and against the harsh treatment of rebels, those at Mytilene in 427 (see p. 266), for instance, and his recorded speech of Diodotus (quoted above, p. 294) is a paean to free speech. He may have dwelt on the ruthlessness of the Athenians at Melos in 416 (the men of Melos were all executed, their women and children enslaved) so that the Athenian disaster in Sicily that followed could be presented as their just deserts.

The Course of the War

The early years of the war saw stalemate as no side had the ingenuity or resources to achieve a decisive advantage. An attempt by Athens to win control of the plains of Boeotia ended in failure after a decisive defeat at the hands of Thebes and her allies at Delium in 424. It took a lucky and unexpected break in 425 to end the stalemate. While raiding on the Peloponnese the Athenians had managed to destroy a small Spartan fleet that was supporting a garrison on the island of Sphacteria on the

western coast of the Peloponnese. (The full land- and seascape of the drama can be well seen today from the hilltop palace of Pylos above Navarino Bay, a good place from which to read Thucydides' narrative of events.) There were only 120 Spartans in the garrison (with some supporting troops) but the shock effect of the Spartan capitulation was immense, not only on Sparta but on the Greek world. Traditionally Spartans died in battle rather than capitulate and the city's reputation was shattered. Sparta was ready to surrender and would probably have done so immediately if raids by a Spartan general Brasidas between 424 and 422 had not succeeded in capturing a number of Athenian cities along the Chalcidice peninsula and the northern Aegean, including the vital centre of Amphipolis.

After an Athenian counter-attack saw the death of Brasidas, both sides were willing to come to terms. The Peace of Nicias, the pious and reserved Athenian general who was much honoured for his achievement, was signed in 421 with each side agreeing to give up its gains. Amphipolis, however, chose to stay independent of Athens and none of the underlying problems that had caused the war had been resolved.

Sparta appeared, at first, the more vulnerable of the two states. Her manpower was in decline, one reason why the loss at Sphacteria was so significant, and her control over the Peloponnese seemed to be faltering. Her ally Corinth refused to sign the treaty when land she had lost was not included in it. Athens, under the influence of a persuasive young aristocrat, Alcibiades, first elected to a generalship in 420, now began interfering directly in the Peloponnese, making treaties of mutual defence with two important cities, Argos, the ancient rival of Sparta, and Elis. (Elis oversaw the Olympic Games and even banned Spartan athletes from them in 420.) Sparta had to respond. A showdown came in 418. Mantinea, on the plain of Arcadia, north of Sparta, was one of the greatest hoplite battles in history. The Spartans and their allies were slightly outnumbered by a force of 9,000 Mantineians and Argives with an attendant Athenian contingent but it was a decisive Spartan victory. It was to be another thirty years before the Peloponnesian cities risked a fresh confrontation with Sparta.

Technically Athens and Sparta had not actually renewed their war but Athens's hopes that she would extend her influence into the Peloponnese were now thwarted. The pause in direct conflict saw some nasty incidents as both Sparta and Athens brutally suppressed 'allies' who tried to assert their independence. It was now that all male citizens of Melos were executed and their women and children enslaved on the demand of a ruthless Athenian Assembly.

Athens's next move was to launch an expedition to the west, to Sicily and southern Italy, as a means of strengthening her position as a Mediterranean power. Once again it was the brainchild of Alcibiades. He was a complex character, 'willful, spoiled, unpredictable and outrageous', as Donald Kagan puts it, but also impossibly attractive to both men and women and intellectually sharpened by his close association with Socrates (see earlier, p. 282). Thucydides considered his motives were largely egocentric, the desire to make his name as a military commander and to tap the wealth of the west for himself.

The problems involved in achieving and holding even a foothold in Sicily when the opposition of such wealthy and well-protected cities as Syracuse was bound to be aroused were immense. Yet such was the confidence of Athens that there was even talk of conquering the whole island. The tensions between the Sicilian cities were exaggerated, hopes of a native Sikel uprising talked up, and the resources of one city, Segesta, who had agreed to support the Athenians, magnified. (To impress the Athenians the Segestans built the magnificent temple that still greets visitors as they approach the city from the east.) Shortly before the fleet sailed, however, the Herms, marble pillars bearing the head of the god Hermes and an erect phallus, which were used as boundary markers and signposts and whose phallic properties were a token of good luck, were mysteriously mutilated. The hysteria that resulted and the witch-hunt that followed in the effort to find the perpetrators shows that, whatever the intellectual pretensions of the elite, Athens remained a deeply superstitious city. A number of aristocrats were rounded up (and Alcibiades himself later recalled from Sicily to face trial) but the matter was never satisfactorily explained. The city was left haunted by a sense of ill omen.

The story of the expedition is Thucydides' masterpiece and deserves to be read in his own words. His account starts with a magnificent description of the fleet of 134 triremes and 5,000 hoplites setting off to the west in 415. Once the fleet had arrived in Sicily, however, Segesta turned out to have few resources and it soon became clear that direct conflict with Syracuse was inevitable. There were three commanders, among them Alcibiades himself, and they disagreed as to whether to launch an immediate attack, delay until they had found more allies, or return home after making a show of strength. Alcibiades was then summoned home (to defend himself against a charge of 'profaning the mysteries'), but defected to Sparta instead. His family had always had strong links with Sparta and he had even represented its interests in Athens but his ambivalent loyalties eventually led to him being murdered by Persians at the request of Sparta in 404 BC. By the time he had left Sicily Athens was in direct conflict with Syracuse, and another of the commanders, Lamachus, was killed in skirmishing around the city. Nicias, was left in charge. Always cautious by nature, he was the commander least committed to direct confrontation with Syracuse, whose fine position, large resources, and well-defended harbour made her a formidable enemy. He found himself trapped, sure of humiliation if he returned home now, but reluctant to risk all by striking hard at his enemy.

In fact, if she had proved more resolute, Athens might have triumphed. Her fleet gave her the initiative at sea and she captured Syracuse's harbour. The construction of siege walls around the city was put in hand. However, Athens lost her chance. The morale of Syracuse was boosted when a Spartan commander, Gylippus, managed to infiltrate a small force into the city. Even though reinforcements arrived from home (bringing the total commitment to half of Athens's entire navy) a land attack failed. Eventually the decision was made to evacuate the harbour, whose entrance was now blocked by the Syracusan fleet.

In one of his most gripping passages Thucydides describes the emotional impact of this decisive battle as the Athenian hoplites waited to see if they would be saved:

As the struggle went on indecisively, the Athenian soldiers revealed the fear in their hearts by the swaying of their bodies; it was a time of agony for them, for escape or destruction seemed every moment just at hand. So long as the issue of the sea-battle was in doubt, you could have heard every kind of sound in one place, the Athenian camp: lamentation, shouting, 'We're winning!', 'We're losing!', all the cries wrung from a great army in great peril. The feelings of the men on the ships were much the same, until at last, when the battle had gone on for a long time, the Syracusans and their allies routed the Athenians and fell upon them, decisive winners, yelling and cheering, and chased them to the land. And then the Athenian sailors, as many of them as had not been captured afloat, beached their ships wherever they could and poured into the camp. The soldiers were not in two minds any more, but all with one impulse, groaning, wailing, lamenting the outcome of the battle, rallied—some of them close to the ships, others to guard the rest of their defensive wall, while the greater part of them began to think now about themselves, about how they were going to survive. (Translation: Kenneth Dover)

A final attempt to urge the Athenians to renew the battle with their surviving ships was met with mutiny and the only option left was to escape overland. The description Thucydides gives is one of his most gripping and heart-rending. The dead were left unburied. The wounded, desperate at being left, dragged themselves after their comrades as they moved off, with those overcome by their own shame of betrayal. The plight of the retreating army, without food and with continual harassment by Spartans and Syracusans, was horrific. When they came to water the hoplites were so thirsty they rushed forward to drink even though enemy missiles rained down on them. They lay in a stream drinking what was turning into a mess of mud and blood before the final surrender. The survivors were herded back to Syracuse and then imprisoned in appalling conditions in the quarries that surrounded the city. Nicias was captured and executed.

There was no doubt that this was a catastrophe. Forty thousand men may have been lost as well as half the city's fleet. Athens's democracy came under severe strain, overthrown in 411 by an oligarchical government of Four Hundred who were in favour of making peace with Sparta. The empire was also in revolt. One rebel, Mytilene, was recaptured but the island of Chios had to be abandoned after a blockade that failed. In 411 Euboea revolted and joined Sparta. However, some historians, among them Simon Hornblower, argue that Thucydides inflated the importance of the Sicilian disaster, partly to create a literary impact. The fact is that Athens was able to continue the war. The Four Hundred were overthrown when they tried to make peace on behalf of Athens and replaced by a semi-democratic government of Five Thousand. The navy remained loyal to the democracy throughout and gradually new ships were built. Despite some defections, the empire survived largely intact. The will to resist remained amazingly strong.

Once again, however, it looked as if there would be deadlock with neither city able to deliver a deathblow to the other. Sparta, on the advice of Alcibiades, had set up a fortified base at Deceleia, halfway between Athens and her frontier with Boeotia, which meant that Spartan soldiers could dominate and ravage land in Attica all the year round. They could also lure slaves away from Athens, and 20,000 are recorded as escaping from the city, a severe drain on its human resources but not enough to crush it. Somehow new resources had to be found to bring the conflict to an end.

The only major source was Persia, and in fact from the 420s both Athens and Sparta had been hoping to secure her support. The Athenians ruined their chances by unwisely backing two satraps who were in rebellion against the monarchy, and from 411 it was Sparta who gained the money to build and equip a fleet. In return the Spartans acquiesced in the achievement of Persia's main objective since the Persian Wars, the return of the Greek cities of Asia to her control. This was the end of any pretence that Sparta was fighting for the liberation of Greece.

The closing years of the war (411–404) saw the experienced Athenian fleet locked in conflict with the newer but better-resourced Spartan one. The ambition of Sparta was now to close off Athenian supplies of grain from the Hellespont. The city was dependent on them. A Spartan fleet was there in 411 and managed to capture the city of Byzantium. The Athenians were not finished, however, and won two major victories in 411 and 410. In 410 the Spartans even sued for peace, but Athens refused to negotiate. At first Athens's stubbornness appeared to have paid off. Byzantium, the vitally strategic city on the Bosphorus, was regained in 408, although another victory at Arginusae (near Lesbos) in 406 was marred when the Athenian Assembly condemned to death the generals who had been unable to rescue survivors from the battle in a brewing storm.

Even so, a final victory for Athens remained elusive. The Spartans now always had enough resources to rebuild their fleet. In 405 the Spartans, under their commander Lysander, captured the town of Lampsachus in the Hellespont and were able to shelter their fleet in its harbour. The Athenian fleet arrived to challenge them but had to beach on the other side of the strait at Aigospotamae where there was no harbour. This left them dangerously exposed. They sailed out day after day to challenge the Spartans, who would not come out. Lysander noticed, however, that once the Athenian ships returned across the strait they were left on the beach unmanned. He launched a sudden attack achieving complete surprise. Out of Athens's fleet of 180 ships, 170 were captured. When the news reached Athens, and the truth sunk in, a howl of despair travelled up from Piraeus to the city. With the Hellespont now under Spartan control, Athens was starved and forced into surrender (404). The Long Walls were pulled down, the fleet reduced almost to nothing, and a Government of Thirty imposed on the city by the victorious Spartans. Against all expectations, Athens had actually been comprehensively defeated, even though the Spartans did not destroy the city completely, afraid perhaps of creating a power vacuum in the area.

Lysander

The question now was whether Sparta would be able to exploit her victory. For ten years after the defeat of Athens the dominant figure of Spartan politics was Lysander. Traditionally Sparta's military enterprises had been led by one of her kings. Lysander was an anomaly. Of good birth but poor, he manipulated his way to power, it was said, by ingratiating himself with the kings. Once in command, as 'admiral' in the

Aegean, he exploited his power ruthlessly. He installed his own supporters as rulers in Aegean cities (including the Government of Thirty in Athens), built up a friendship with Cyrus, the Persian viceroy in Asia Minor, and even intervened as far afield as Syracuse, where he backed Dionysius I (see below), and Egypt. (The only comprehensive survey of this period is the expensive volume vi: *The Fourth Century BC* of the Cambridge Ancient History, edited by D. M. Lewis et al., Cambridge and New York, 1994. A more popular approach is to be found in Michael Scott, *From Democrats to Kings*, London, 2009.)

Most remarkable of all, he encouraged a cult worship of himself as ‘hero’, the first time this is known to have happened in Greece. He created a tableau at the entrance of the Sacred Way leading up to the sanctuary at Delphi. Here his victory was commemorated by a Monument to the Admirals where statues of himself, his fellow admirals, and gods mingled in mutual self-glorification. (It was recorded there in the second century AD by the Roman traveller Pausanias but is now lost.) Back across the Aegean, the people of Samos, delighted to be free of their Athenian overlords, created their own festival, the Lysandrea, in his honour. In 398 he appears to have been instrumental in securing the succession of king Agesilaus to the Spartan throne, despite the latter’s lameness which many had considered a bar to his elevation.

Lysander’s position was always vulnerable, however. Sparta’s support in the Aegean remained limited. She had none of the advantages Athens had enjoyed in the 470s. She had no cultural or religious links with the Aegean world and showed no interest in developing any. In the eyes of many Greeks she had compromised herself by using Persian help so shamelessly. Lysander now involved himself further in Persian politics. In 402 he backed an attempt by Cyrus, whose brother Artaxerxes (ruled 404–359) had become king, to seize the Persian throne. It was a failure and Cyrus was killed. (The Greek army had to march back to the coast, an exploit recorded by the historian Xenophon in his *Anabasis*, the March of the Ten Thousand, one of the best adventure stories in Greek literature.) The failure was a major blow for Lysander. His credibility was destroyed and Sparta lost its Persian subsidies. In 396 Agesilaus showed that he was his own man (and not merely the creation of Lysander) by initiating an expedition to liberate the Greek cities of Asia from Persian rule.

The Corinthian War

The Persians now took the initiative in the Aegean. They stimulated a revolt against Sparta by Thebes and Corinth, former allies of Sparta who had been dissatisfied by the outcome of the Peloponnesian War, from which they had gained nothing. This was the so-called Corinthian War (395–386). On land it was a series of inconclusive battles. Lysander died in one of the first in 395. (It was said that, after his death, papers were found in his house in Sparta, with details of a plot to overthrow the Spartan monarchy and replace it with a government of ‘men of excellence’.) On sea

the outcome was more significant. A Persian fleet commanded by an Athenian mercenary, Conon, destroyed the Spartan navy in the Aegean, and Conon then sailed to Athens, where the source of his support was overlooked in the joy that the Spartan hold on the Aegean had been broken. Persian money was used to rebuild the Long Walls and there was even some attempt to re-create the Athenian empire.

The Corinthian War was in many ways a continuation of the Peloponnesian, and once again it was the Persians who provided the means of ending it. Artaxerxes now realized that a revived Athenian empire would be to his detriment, particularly as the Athenians would challenge his renewed control of the Greek cities of Asia. He moved back towards Sparta, and in 386, in the so-called King's Peace, the Spartans once again acquiesced in his control of the Greeks of Asia. In return Artaxerxes guaranteed the independence of every Greek city and gave Sparta subsidies to uphold it. Both Artaxerxes and Sparta were the victors, and Sparta now had the excuse and the resources to break up the alliances that were forming around her enemies, Thebes and Athens. Artaxerxes had his empire restored, and threats that it would be challenged by an Athenian empire reduced.

The Fall of Sparta and Victory of Thebes

Any 'victory' was, however, short-lived, as a result of Sparta's inability to act with any kind of sensitivity. She was quick to reassert her leadership of the Peloponnese, crushing the city of Mantinea, for instance. Her greatest blunder came in 382 when her troops were sent to intervene in civil unrest in her old enemy, Thebes. The city was simply seized, to the universal condemnation of the Greek world. Even the historian Xenophon, an Athenian aristocrat, who had moved to Sparta after being exiled from Athens and developed pro-Spartan sympathies, could not defend Sparta's actions. The Spartan garrison was eventually thrown out in 379, and the Spartans did not improve their standing by launching an ill-judged attack on Athens that failed miserably.

Sparta's short-sightedness even stimulated a new Athenian 'empire', the one outcome that any intelligent strategic planning should have been designed to avoid. Athens declared that her motive was 'to make the Spartans leave the Greeks to enjoy peace in freedom and autonomy' and called on allies to join her. Memories of the former Athenian empire remained strong, however, and there was some reluctance to do so. Athens had to promise not to impose settlements on member states, interfere with their internal politics, or impose tribute. (When, inevitably, contributions had to be called for from members, they were termed 'assessments' rather than 'tribute'.) Seventy states, including Thebes, eventually joined what is known as the Second Athenian League (378–377).

It was clear by now, however, that Athens was very much weaker than she had been in the fifth century and that any significant military action would put immense strain on the city's resources. It was to be Thebes, not Athens, who would humble Sparta. After regaining her independence in 379, Thebes had been rebuilding her

position in Boeotia, and in 371 she insisted, in a treaty with Sparta, on signing on behalf of all the Boeotian cities. Sparta evoked the King's Peace to justify attacking Thebes. At the ensuing Battle of Leuctra the Thebans smashed the Spartan army, leaving a thousand Spartan dead on the battlefield. It was a decisive battle that left the Greek world in shock. Spartan rule in the Peloponnese collapsed. From now on Sparta was no more than a second-rate power. The rigidity of her society, her insensitivity towards fellow Greeks, and a declining citizen base meant that at some point her weakness would be exposed. Once her army had been humiliated as comprehensively as it had been at Leuctra there was no way back.

For ten years Thebes remained the dominant city of Greece, although this was due not so much to her own strength as to the weakness of others. Her success depended on the inspired political and military leadership of Epaminondas, an austere and incorruptible man profoundly influenced by the works of Pythagoras. Cicero was to regard him as one of the greatest of the Greeks, and if the biography of him by Plutarch had survived so might later generations. He and his fellow general Pelopidas were supported by a core of 300 highly trained troops, the Sacred Band, who were pair-bonded in homosexual relationships. Thebes's influence spread south to the Peloponnese, where she continued to restrain any possible revival of Sparta, and as far north as Thessaly. Cities such as Corinth and Megara became what were in effect client states. When Athens became hostile (going so far as to make an alliance with Sparta to oppose Theban expansionism), the Thebans even began building a fleet. Within Boeotia itself, they finally captured the other leading city of the plain, Orchomenus, in 364, and killed all its male inhabitants, sending the surviving women and children into slavery. Theban dominance was as brutal as that of any other state.

One of the most fruitful results of the Spartan collapse was the restoration of the people of Messenia. Despite suppression and exile a Messenian identity had survived and the exiles were called home by the Theban general Epaminondas. The new settlement of Messene, founded in 369, is beautifully situated on the slopes of Mount Ithome and surrounded by impressive walls. The city flourished and effectively acted as a bulwark against any future Spartan resurgence in the western Peloponnese. Recent excavations and the conservation of the site have been a model of their kind and the city is earning plaudits and awards for the successful presentation of the ruins of the central agora. The stadium is now being used again for cultural events.

In 362 Epaminondas was killed at Mantinea when fighting a Spartan and Athenian army in the Peloponnese. Pelopidas had died two years before. Perhaps inspired leadership was the key to Theban success, because from that moment Theban power ebbed away. A peace was made on the basis that every state should keep what it had, but Theban control of her 'empire' was gradually eroded as continual warfare wore down her resources. Xenophon, bringing his *History* to a close, remarked that 'there was even more uncertainty and confusion in Greece after the battle [of Mantinea] than there had been before'.

The Vulnerability of the City-State in the Fourth Century

The fifth century had seen a comparatively stable Greek world with Athens and Sparta maintaining hegemony over large areas of the Aegean and Greek mainland. This age was now over. Sparta was humbled, the short-lived supremacy of Thebes had faded, and Athens was unable to maintain an imperial role. Reports of the 350s show slackness and corruption in the Athenian shipyards, equipment borrowed and never returned and major shortages of sailcloth, hemp, and rope. With Sparta eclipsed, the Second Athenian League had also lost its purpose. Athens's response, as it had been a hundred years before, was to impose her control more ruthlessly. This time she was met with widespread revolt. In 357 in the so-called Social War, many of the League members broke free and others gradually drifted out of her control. In the same period Philip of Macedon was encroaching on Athenian interests in the northern Aegean.

As W. G. Runciman has argued (in an essay 'Doomed to Extinction: The *Polis* as an Evolutionary Dead-End'), there had never evolved in any Greek city a wealthy elite capable of focusing the state on the kind of ruthless economic imperialism needed to sustain hegemony over a large area. In this sense, democracy, by refusing to allow the wealthy to emerge as an uncontrolled elite, acted as a brake on ambition. Plato indeed, in his critique of democracy, *The Republic*, accused Pericles of encouraging the Athenians to sink into sloth and greed as a result of the handouts that he had granted them although one can hardly count this as an argument against the other benefits of democracy. At the same time, the Greek cities never broke out of their constitutional conservatism. Citizenship was a jealously guarded privilege. Rome offers a contrast. There, even slaves could be freed and incorporated into the citizen body. More significantly, perhaps, a defeated rival could be transformed into an ally with rights of citizenship and demands of military service. (See Chapters 21 and 22.) As Polybius, the Greek historian who tried to explain the defeat of the Greeks by Rome in the second century, understood, this gave Rome an almost unlimited supply of men. No Greek city ever adopted a similar approach, and in many cases the protected citizen body simply contracted with time. Sparta had been able to raise 8,000 citizen hoplites at the time of the Persian Wars, only 1,200 a century later.

The collapse of Athenian and Spartan hegemony left a world of small and scattered Greek communities. One response was Panhellenism, the feeling that the Greeks should somehow sink their differences and unite in a shared enterprise. The roots of Panhellenism lay back in the previous century in the resistance to Xerxes and they were kept alive by the continuing resilience of the Persian empire. The most fervent exponent of Panhellenism was the Athenian orator Isocrates (436–338 BC), who extolled the virtues of Greek culture as a civilizing force (although by 'Greek' it is often assumed that he meant 'Athenian'). The chances of any such common movement were always remote. The cities had developed new sensitivities to outside control from either Greek or foreigner, as Athens's experience with the Second Athenian League showed. Furthermore, the years of continual warfare had sapped their resources, and there are universal reports in the fourth century of

land hunger and debt. Many cities experienced *stasis*, civil unrest between rival factions. There was a new shifting population of poor, refugees or landless individuals, wandering the Greek world in search of sustenance.

There was one occupation which was able to take in the more able-bodied and that was service as a mercenary. The rise in the use of mercenary troops was one of the most significant developments of the fourth century. The Persians had come increasingly to rely on them, for the suppression of a major revolt in Egypt from 404 onwards, for instance. The Egyptians used mercenaries in return, and in 343 there were an estimated 35,000 in the country. The mercenary could be trained, by those who could afford to pay him, as a professional soldier able to fight all the year round. At the same time, outside influences, probably from Thrace, led to the development of the peltast, who wore lighter armour and boots and who carried a longer spear. (The name comes from the small leather shield he carried.) The peltast was more than a match for the heavy and slow-moving hoplite (peltasts employed by Corinth defeated a Spartan army in 390), although the hoplites continued to form the core of any city army.

The rise of the mercenary army coincided with other military developments. The Athenian orator Demosthenes describes them well:

In the old days the Spartans, like everyone else, would spend the four or five months of the summer 'season' in invading and laying waste the enemy's territory with heavy infantry and levies of citizens, and would then retire again; and they were so old-fashioned, or rather such good citizens, that they never used money to buy an advantage from anyone, but their fighting was of the fair and open kind. But now you must surely see that most disasters are due to traitors, and none are the result of a regular pitched battle. On the other hand you hear of Philip [of Macedon] marching unchecked, not because he leads a phalanx of heavy infantry, but because he is accompanied by skirmishers, cavalry, archers, mercenaries and similar troops... I need hardly tell you that he makes no difference between summer and winter and has no season set apart for inaction. (Translation: J. H. Vince, Loeb Classical Library edition)

This, therefore, was the world of the new professional army, able to fight all the year round without being inhibited by the traditional conventions of warfare. One significant development was the art of siege warfare. Traditionally, battles had been fought over land and normally cities had been left untouched. From the fourth century a more ruthless approach to warfare led to the direct targeting of cities. It was perhaps as much the desire to gain booty with which to pay the mercenaries as to crush an enemy completely that lay behind the change. All over the Greek world cities now became fortified. As we have seen Messene in the Peloponnese was equipped with walls from the beginning. At Gyphotokastro in northern Attica (ancient Eleutherae) there are magnificent fourth-century walls overlooking the pass from Boeotia.

Dionysius, Tyrant of Syracuse, and Jason of Thessaly

The smaller Greek cities did not have the resources to participate in this new warfare. By the early fourth century it was becoming clear that only determined and

autocratic leaders could squeeze them out and so there was a move towards dictatorships that would, ultimately, transform the nature of the Greek world. Agesilaus had hinted at what was possible. In Syracuse in the same period a more successful leader, Dionysius, emerged, as a response to the continued pressures on the city by the Carthaginians who held the west of Sicily. Dionysius' rule, initiated in 405, is reminiscent of that of the earlier Greek tyrants. He was primarily a soldier, and his position was underwritten by his continual mobilization of Syracuse in war against Carthage. There were no less than four wars, three of them instigated by Dionysius, in forty years. None was conclusive, and the Carthaginian hold on western Sicily remained strong. In mobilizing the Greeks, Dionysius proved ruthless. The need to have a united state, rather than personal ambition, may have been the reason for his suppression of alternative centres of power, such as Rhegium, captured in 387, and his bringing of defeated Greek populations under direct Syracusan control. He extended his authority over what remained of Greek Sicily as well as virtually every Greek city of the Italian mainland.

Italy brought Dionysius resources: tin, copper, iron, silver, and wood, as well as mercenaries. His men came not only from Sicily and the Greek cities of Italy but from mainland Greece, northern and central Italy, and Iberia. They were well armed, allowed to wear the armour and use the weapons they were most used to. The problem was finance, and here Dionysius was unscrupulous in grabbing temple silver and gold, manipulating his coinage, and confiscating the property of his enemies. He even raided the treasuries of Etruscan cities.

There was a strong personal element to Dionysius' rule. He was not simply a military commander. In his first treaty with Carthage (405) he was named personally as the ruler of Syracuse. He consolidated his position by a network of marriage alliances. (On one occasion he was said to have married two wives, one from Syracuse and one from the Italian mainland, the same day and consummated both marriages the same night.) Several of his seven children were married back into the family to make a formidable network of personal loyalties. The personal nature of his rule was underlined by the wording of his alliance. In a treaty with Athens, for instance, it was agreed that Athens would send him help if 'anyone makes war by land or sea against Dionysius or his descendants or any place where Dionysius rules'. There are also hints in the sources of the trappings of kingship—purple dress, and a golden crown. However, Dionysius' only formal title was that of 'general with full powers' and he never appeared on coins.

Dionysius never forgot that he was a Greek and that Sicily was part of a wider Greek world. He presided over *symposia*, wrote poems and tragedies, and sent chariots to compete in the Olympic Games. He supported Sparta in the Corinthian War, supplying her with enough ships to give her superiority over Athens. Later in his reign he was wooed by Athens and finally made a treaty with her in 368. The next year Dionysius entered his play *The Ransoming of Hector* in the Athenian Lenaea festival. The judges courteously awarded it first prize, at which news it was said that Dionysius celebrated by drinking himself to death.

If Dionysius had defeated Carthage, the history of the western Mediterranean might have taken a different turn. For a start, it would have left him free to move into Italy. It was during his reign that the Etruscans, who had dominated central Italy for centuries, began to weaken. Even the expansion of Rome might have been checked. In the event, Syracuse ceased to be expansionist after his death and Rome was able to consolidate her position on the mainland. Within a century the Greek cities of Italy were under her control although Syracuse herself was not to fall until 212 BC (see below, pp. 377, 394).

The example of Dionysius showed that it was possible for a determined individual to seize power and to mobilize wealth and resources, particularly professional mercenary troops, in the service of a strong and united state. Others soon followed. Thessaly, for instance, was taken over by one Jason, a native of the city of Pherae, in the late 370s. The area was one of rich plains and large estates. It already had a tradition of one-man rule in the shape of an elective monarch, the Tagos. Jason established himself as Tagos, organized a national army, and for a short time, until he was murdered, set Thessaly up as the most powerful state in Greece. Xenophon records a speech of his in which he extols the virtues of a hand-picked mercenary army trained on hardship and richly rewarded if it shows appetite for war.

The Kingdom of Macedon

In his speech Jason listed Macedonia, a fertile region on his northern borders, as among his targets. Its timber would allow him to build a fleet that he would man from among the peoples he had conquered. As it turned out, it was Macedon (as the state is normally called, Macedonia is the region) that was to do the conquering in the mid-fourth century. As Jason had realized, it was a fertile area with good rainfall and potentially strong if its resources were mobilized. The centre of Macedonia was the Emathian plain on the Aegean coast. It was too marshy for human occupation, but the well-watered mountain slopes around the plain had supported settlements since prehistoric times. There were other river plains, such as that of the Strymon to the east, and here again settlements were grouped on the mountain slopes. Inland, Macedonia became more mountainous, with the Pindus Mountains, for instance, forming a natural barrier with Molossis (later Epirus) to the west. (See E. Borza, *In the Shadow of Olympus: The Emergence of Macedon*, Princeton and London, 1990.)

There was little natural coherence to Macedonia and many of its boundaries, particularly those to the east and north, were ill defined. The state depended at any one time on the success of its king in holding off the states which surrounded it—Illyria to the north, Thrace to the east, Molossis to the west, and Thessaly to the south. The Athenians, in search of the same raw materials as Jason, were continuously probing along the coastline. As for the peoples of the region, very little is yet known about them. A condescending Athenian such as Demosthenes could talk of ‘that Macedonian riffraff which could not even offer a good slave for sale in days gone by’ but some may have spoken Greek dialects (the extent to which Greek was spoken in

Macedonia is a subject of hot dispute) and certainly there is evidence of Greek cults in the area. It is meaningless to try and establish whether the Macedonians were, on this evidence, ethnically Greek or not. (See the good discussion in this issue in Patrick Geary, *The Myth of Nations*, Princeton, 2002.) What was important for the years to come was that Macedonia had large resources that could give it considerable power if used effectively by its rulers.

The Macedonian monarchy had shown remarkable survival skills. By the fourth century it was already some 300 years old, and its longevity seems to have depended on its success in preserving the heartland of the kingdom from invaders. The kings themselves claimed that their family was of Greek origin, from Argos, in fact, although it has been argued that this claim was invented in the first half of the fifth century by an earlier monarch, Alexander I, to improve his relationships with the Greek world. The judges at the Olympic Games accepted the claim enough to make a distinction between the Macedonian royal family, who were allowed to take part in the Games, and the Macedonians as a whole, who were not. The monarchy seems to have depended on the personal qualities of each king. Treaties were made directly with him, he controlled the army absolutely, and when, as happened in the case of Philip II, he appeared at a Panhellenic festival, it was as an individual, not as the representative of his state.

Philip of Macedon

It was with the accession of Philip II in either 360 or 359 BC that ruler and resources became combined in a formidable expansionist force that was to transform the Greek world in less than fifty years. In the nineteenth century Philip was only known through Greek sources, above all the speeches of Demosthenes, and was often portrayed—by British liberals, for instance—as a tyrant who destroyed the liberty of Greece. The career of his son Alexander also tended to place Philip in the shadows. German historians, however, were more sympathetic to him, casting him in the role of a strong man bringing order to surrounding scattered and weak states, as Bismarck had done in Germany. In recent years Philip has been recognized as a major historical figure who laid the foundations without which his son would probably never have succeeded in his own right. (See Ian Worthington, *Philip II of Macedonia*, New Haven and London, 2008, as an excellent biography.)

Philip had the advantage of being the legitimate ruler within a long-established monarchy. This set him apart from the other Greek despots. He also had access, within Macedonia, to the resources to build up a mercenary army. One advantage of using mercenaries was that they could be forged into a fighting force with little reference to the conventions of the past. Here Philip proved a brilliant commander, able both to inspire and to innovate. The main weapon of his men, both infantry and cavalry, was the *sarissa*, a long pike. It enabled them to fight at long range and there was no way that hoplites could engage with it. Because the *sarissa* gave the infantry comparative invulnerability, it could dispense with the heavy and expensive

armour that burdened the hoplite. Men could march fast and manoeuvre easily. Once infantry had made a gap in the hoplite ranks, cavalry was used to break through. The highly disciplined and flexible army that had emerged by 350 was to set the scene for thirty years of Macedonian conquest both by Philip and by his son Alexander. Philip also made important advances in siege warfare. It was he who was responsible for the development of the siege catapult, for instance.

The range and variety of Philip's enemies were such that military prowess could never be enough. His first task when he succeeded to the throne was to define the borders of his state. This inevitably brought him into contact with a range of different peoples and cultures, including sophisticated Greeks and rough baron kings of the north. Philip's methods were a clever mix of military might and diplomacy. He realized that land to the north and west of traditional Macedonia would be difficult to hold and he never extended boundaries there further than his predecessors had done. To maintain relationships with their rulers, he embarked on a series of marriages, one each with an Illyrian, Molossian (the formidable Olympias, mother of his son, Alexander), and Thracian, and two with Thessalians. In the east, however, he was more adventurous, adding the Strymon valley to his kingdom after taking the city of Amphipolis in 357. (Excavations of the city suggest a Macedonian elite moved in to preside over the Greek inhabitants.) This gave him access to the rich mines of southern Thrace. Their wealth, exploited now for the first time to the full, helped him to finance his mercenaries.

It can be argued, in fact, that the continual demand for the resources with which to sustain his armies underlay the policy of expansion that followed. Amphipolis had never been regained by the Athenians after its loss in the Peloponnesian War, but in 357 and 354 Philip added two Athenian cities, Pydna and Methone on the Thermaic Gulf, to his conquests. (At Methone he lost an eye when struck by an arrow.) The Athenians reacted by declaring war in 357, but Philip was only one of their adversaries at the time and they could do nothing to save their cities. He now controlled the coastlines either side of the Chalcidice peninsula. In 348 he was to move into the peninsula itself. The great city of Olynthos, the most important in the Greek north, was sacked in the same year. Athens promised it help but only a small force arrived. It was so successfully razed to the ground that it was never reoccupied, and provides the best examples of Greek house plans to have survived. Among the finds have been arrowheads evocatively bearing the name of Philip. There was now no possible source of Greek resistance to Philip in the north-eastern Aegean.

In these same years there had been Macedonian infiltration into Thessaly, her southern neighbour. By 352 Thessaly was under Philip's control, and he had exploited alliances with Thessalian aristocrats to build up his cavalry and to become, in effect, Tagos. Luck as much as opportunism played a part in Philip's next expansion south. The shrine of Delphi, oracle to the Greek world (see p. 242), was controlled by the Amphityonic League, an ancient association of central Greek peoples. In 356 a dispute broke out between the members and one of them, Phocis, seized control of the shrine itself. Thebes opposed her, as did the Thessalians. Philip was inexorably drawn into the conflict. He now chose to act diplomatically, using those opposed to Phocis to dislodge her from Delphi. In the settlement that followed he

was admitted to membership of the Amphityonic League. At the next Pythian Games it was Philip who presided.

It was Athens that felt most uneasy about the peace that followed. She had faced the humiliation of the loss of her outposts in the northern Aegean, and the logic of Macedonian expansionism to the east suggested that the Hellespont, channel for her grain supplies, would be threatened next. From 352 one of the greatest orators the city ever produced, Demosthenes, was warning of the danger of Philip and the need to resist. Yet what could Athens do? The Second Athenian League had collapsed by 355 and the city's finances were stretched. There was no way she could effectively fight in the north against such a formidable opponent as Philip. When the dispute over Delphi was ongoing, Athens had supported Phocis, largely to spite Thebes. In 346 she had to abandon Phocis, and when Philip offered the city an alliance she hesitatingly accepted it, though fully aware of how much she had compromised her position.

Philip may genuinely have wanted to maintain peace with Athens, not least to be able to use her fleet in one of his new plans, an invasion of Asia. In the city, however, there was increasing shame over what appeared to be capitulation to his growing power. It was exploited by Demosthenes (384–322 BC). Demosthenes had learnt his trade the hard way. His father had died when he was 7 and the family resources had been frittered away by his unscrupulous guardians. He mastered rhetoric in order to retrieve what little remained and his early, faltering attempts show just how difficult it was to dominate an Athenian audience. However, he succeeded. His speeches urging resistance to the barbarian invader are among the finest pieces of Greek rhetoric to have survived. Yet they are rhetoric. Demosthenes was leader of a democratic faction and was carrying out his own political struggles within the city. He used all the tricks necessary to command the attention and support of a volatile Athenian assembly, and the events described in his speeches are now discounted as accurate accounts. However distorted, the speeches remain majestic defences of liberty and democracy against the forces of tyranny. (One can, perhaps, compare his use of rhetoric with that of Winston Churchill.)

It is hard to apportion blame for the showdown between Philip and the Greeks that followed. Philip was steadily moving towards Athens's interests in the Hellespont, tightening his grip on Thrace, for instance. So Demosthenes had some excuse for continuing to make the issue of a Macedonian threat to Athens the central one of his oratory. However, Demosthenes' determination to prove that Philip was an aggressor and had betrayed the alliance was equally provocative, and Philip may have lost any faith he had that peace with Athens was possible. By 340 Philip was indeed threatening Byzantium, the key port on the Hellespont, and this was enough for Demosthenes to persuade Athens to declare war in the same year. The seizure of an Athenian grain fleet by Philip soon followed. Then Philip moved into Greece itself. Athenian hoplites with Theban support faced the new-style Macedonian army at the Battle of Chaeroneia in Boeotia. The outcome was to reshape the future of the Greek world.

Alexander the Great and the Transformation of the Greek World

The Battle of Chaeroneia, 4 August 338 BC, marks one of the decisive moments of Greek history. By now, twenty years into his reign, Philip II of Macedon had strengthened his resources, perfected his army, and achieved a dominant position in northern Greece including control of non-Greek peoples. Athens, faced with the strangulation of her supply of grain from the Black Sea, had finally declared war, and Thebes agreed to stand by her. Philip drove down into Greece, met the assembled hoplite armies on the plain of Chaeroneia, and destroyed them. The Athenians alone lost 1,000 dead and 2,000 prisoners. The cities, with the exception of Sparta, who refused to join, were now bullied by Philip into forming an alliance, the League of Corinth, of which he was voted the leading member. Their governments were packed with pro-Macedonian dependants and forbidden to engage in any independent activity. Philip was supreme in Greece, and, although the cities themselves would not have been aware of it, the era of the independent city-state was over.

Philip's dominance had, in fact, been prophesied by the great Athenian speechwriter Isocrates. In a recitation written for the Olympic Games of 380 Isocrates had argued that the only way to bring unity to the fragmented Greek world was to launch a national crusade under one leader against Persia. In the last days of his life, he saw the triumph of Philip and congratulated him on his victory at Chaeroneia. Philip had, indeed, created a new political system, a model of monarchy whose power was based ultimately on the excellence of the monarch himself and the troops and nobles who gave personal allegiance to him. It was a model that had become totally alien to the Greek world, but now it was to prove the most successful and resilient form of government in this world for the next 200 years and even provided an exemplar for the Roman emperors.

In the first instance, the relationship between the king and his troops and war leaders depended on continual victory in war with all the benefits of booty and prestige that came with it. Philip, although in his mid-forties, was determined to maintain the momentum of success. He now embarked on the most ambitious of his plans, an invasion of Persia. The time seemed ripe. There was a power struggle for the Persian throne, and both Egypt and Babylon were in rebellion. Philip harked back 150 years, disingenuously claiming the right to lead the Greeks in revenge for Xerxes' invasion and the desecration of the Greek shrines. By 336 an advance force of 10,000 Macedonians had already crossed the Hellespont and was campaigning along the Asian coast.

The Young Alexander

Whatever his triumphs in war, Philip faced frustration in one quarter, from his eldest son and presumed heir, Alexander, the child of his Molossian Greek wife, the powerful Olympias. Through his parents, Alexander was aware of a heritage that supposedly took him back on his mother's side to Achilles and on his father's to Heracles, a heady genetic mix. As a young boy he steeped himself in Homer, and perhaps even in childhood lived in a half-fantasy world of heroic combat. Later accounts suggest that he had the most famous intellectual figure of the time, Aristotle, as his tutor, though little remains to tell of the fruits of their encounter. Alexander was self-confident, endlessly curious, and reckless. He showed every sign of being a brilliant commander. Already, when only 18, he had been entrusted by Philip with command of the cavalry at Chaeroneia, and was not slow to claim at least part of the credit for the victory himself. (For reliable biographies of Alexander, see Paul Cartledge, *Alexander the Great: The Hunt for a New Past*, London and New York, 2004; A. B. Bosworth, *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great*, Cambridge and New York, 1988; Peter Green, *Alexander of Macedon, 356–323 BC: A Historical Biography*, London 1974.)

Conflict between father and adolescent son was in these circumstances inevitable. When, in 337 Philip embarked on yet another marriage, with Cleopatra, the daughter of a Macedonian noble, and his only fully Macedonian wife, an appalling row broke out. Alexander doubtless feared any new sons would have a purer Macedonian heritage than himself and thus perhaps be preferred for the throne on his father's death. He was forced temporarily into exile, and even when he returned his status remained uncertain, especially when Cleopatra became pregnant.

Alexander's chance came suddenly and unexpectedly in October 336. Philip was host at the marriage of his daughter by Olympias to her uncle, the king of Molossis, one more link in the network of marriage alliances with neighbouring states in which Philip specialized. The celebrations were designed as an extravagant display of Macedonian power, and Philip seemed relaxed walking in the grand procession without a bodyguard. Suddenly a young nobleman, in fact a member of this bodyguard, stepped forward and stabbed him. The intrigues behind the attack are still unclear (later gossip talked of backroom homosexual jealousies) but Philip was soon dead.

The ceremonies had taken place at Aigai, the original Macedonian capital (the modern Vergina). This was an ancient settlement, its earliest burials go back as early as the eleventh century BC, and it had become an important cultural centre for the Macedonian dynasty in the sixth and fifth centuries with links to the major Greek cities. Even after the move of the capital to Pella by king Archelaus in the late fifth century, Aigai retained its role as a sacred site, and the legend persisted that, so long as the Macedonian kings were buried here, the dynasty would survive.

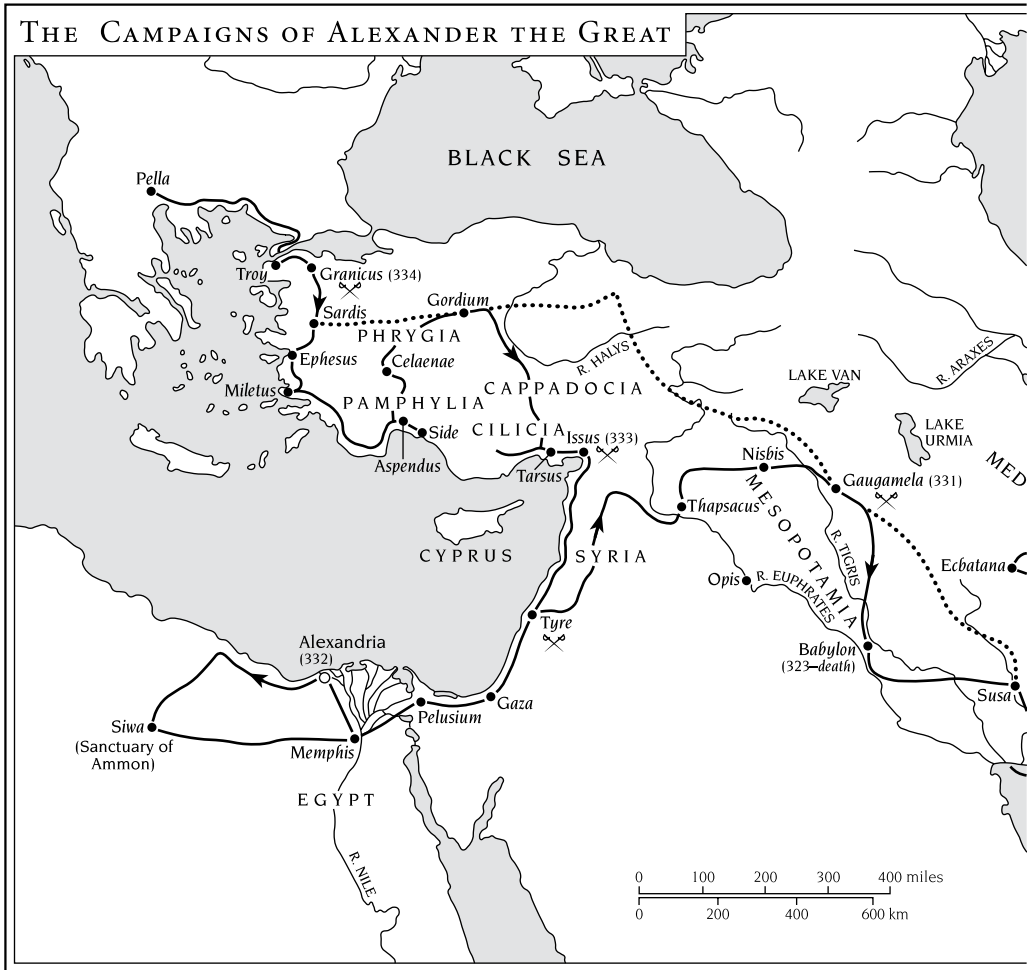
In 1977, excavations were carried out on a monumental, man-made tumulus in the necropolis of Aigai. Underneath the great mound four elaborate tombs were

found. One had been looted, although it was decorated with a painting of the Rape of Persephone, apparently by the celebrated Greek painter Nicomachus. Further underground were untouched tombs, sumptuously crowded with gold. In one sarcophagus a middle-aged man, one eye-socket scarred but healed, lay in a chamber alongside another with a woman aged about 20. The first chamber had been hurriedly constructed, the second added later. The male body was in a gold coffin surrounded by the grave goods of a warrior. Was this the body of Philip, hurriedly buried by his son Alexander after the killing and later joined by his last wife Cleopatra, who had been murdered in her turn by Alexander's mother Olympias? In an adjoining chamber a woman lies with a youth, probably a later burial still. This may well have been the posthumous son of Alexander murdered with his mother Roxane in 311 BC. The body of Alexander himself was, as will be seen, never returned to Aigai, and so the legend that that dynasty would die, as indeed it did, if the burials ceased, proved to be true.

Whether Alexander knew anything in advance about the attack on Philip is impossible to know. He certainly stood to benefit but only if he moved fast. There were speedy executions of those who had questioned his position as heir. Olympias herself returned from her native Epirus to engineer the murder of Cleopatra and her child, a baby daughter. Somehow Alexander won the acclaim of the nobility and the army, probably by claiming he would continue his father's policies with all the rewards they had brought them. Reasonably secure at home, he now had to deal with his neighbours. The mainland Greeks along with the Illyrians and the Thracians saw the chance to reassert their independence. Alexander marched an army southwards to overawe the leading Greek cities, Athens and Thebes, and force them to accept him as leader of the League of Corinth in his father's place. The Thracians and the Illyrians were then defeated in brilliant campaigns. While he was on the northern borders of Macedonia, Thebes chose to revolt. Alexander was always sensitive to betrayal, real or imagined. His move south was so rapid (500 kilometres in only 12 days) that the Thebans knew nothing of it until he was three hours' march away from the city. When the city resisted, it was stormed. Six thousand Thebans died, 30,000 were enslaved, and Thebes was destroyed—only its religious shrines left without violation. These campaigns had taken no more than a few weeks and left the Greeks stunned. Whatever his apparent love of the world of Homer's heroes, Alexander never appreciated the spirit of liberty that had been such an essential feature of Greek culture.

The Persian Adventure

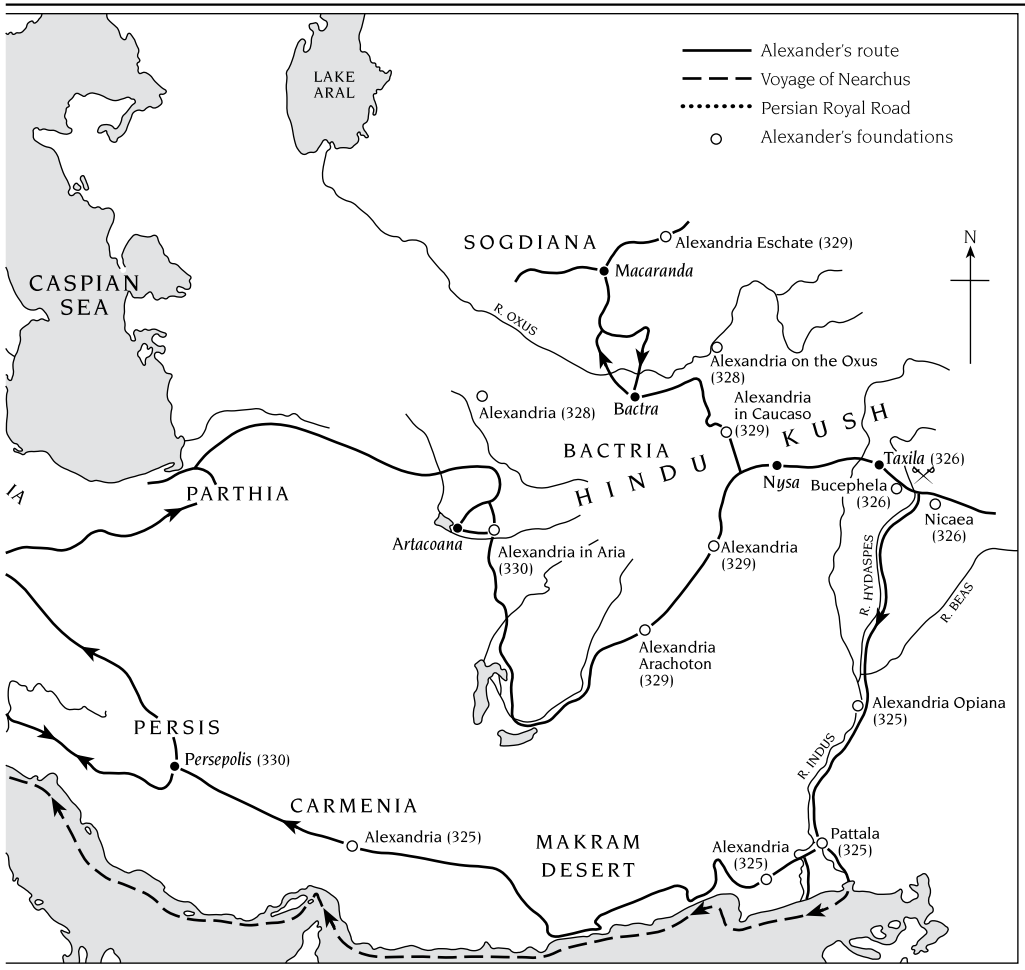
It was his mastery of the Greek world that enabled Alexander to look to the east. The Macedonian forces sent into Persia by Philip were in trouble. A new king, Darius III, had gained control of the empire. He had suppressed the revolts in Egypt and Babylon, and his commanders in the west, notably a Greek mercenary leader, Memnon of Rhodes, had pushed the Macedonians back to the Hellespont. Alexander



MAP 6

repeated the claim of his father that he was the avenger of the Greeks. The claim had never looked good in the mouth of the victor of Chaeronaia and did not improve by being taken up by the destroyer of Thebes.

The decision to resume his father's campaign against Persia seemed particularly foolhardy. It was true that the Persian empire had been in steady decline since the fifth century. The satrapies had become hereditary, allowing local families to consolidate themselves as local dynasties, so losing the vigour appointed officials would bring to the administration, but this was still a relatively strong state. It had a large army and considerable resources. Its very size would ensure that any invading army could easily become isolated and vulnerable to annihilation. Nor did it make much sense for Alexander to leave Greece behind this early in his reign. There was such



widespread resentment on the mainland that half of the Macedonian troops had to be left there just to keep order. Alexander had no heir, and, if he were to die, Macedonia and its territories were likely to collapse into anarchy.

Alexander's temperament ensured that he would take the risk. The prize of Persia was simply too tempting to pass by, and it was a fine opportunity to prove himself to his father's commanders who had been primed for the invasion. The superb army created by his father was still intact. Its core was the Companions, an elite cavalry force of perhaps 1,800 men whose leaders traditionally enjoyed a rough comradeship with the king. They were supported by a similar number of highly trained Thessalian horsemen, and with other mercenaries there may have been a total of 5,000 cavalry. In the infantry Macedonians also formed a core, of perhaps 3,000 well-disciplined men. They were armed with their long pikes (*sarissae*) and light armour and marched in cohesive phalanxes that could be assembled in various

formations according to the demands of the terrain. They were backed by light infantry. Those recorded include javelin men from the mountain regions of Thrace, archers from Crete, and Illyrians. All could be used on difficult territory. There also seem to have been some 7,000 traditionally armed hoplites from Greece itself, but, after the campaign began, little is heard of them. It may have been that Alexander simply could not trust them, particularly in battles where they would come face to face with the fellow Greeks that Darius was to use as mercenaries. In total, with Macedonians, Greek 'allies', and mercenaries, Alexander's was a balanced and flexible fighting force of some 37,000, not enormous in comparison to the army with which Xerxes had invaded Greece, but effective if used with imagination. It was supported by the siege machines, including the torsion catapult, which had been perfected under Philip. To accompany the enterprise there were surveyors, engineers, architects, scientists, and a historian, Callisthenes. Another 10,000 men from Philip's original invasion force awaited them across the Hellespont.

To pay for this army Alexander had to scour the Macedonian treasury, and so the demand for booty with which to maintain his men was an important impulse in what followed. It was not just money that bound the troops to Alexander. The traditional loyalties enjoyed by a Macedonian monarch were reinforced by Alexander's own charismatic style of leadership that embraced the high-risk strategy of fighting at the forefront of any battle.

The accounts of the campaigns that followed come down from sources of the Roman period. Of the five major sources none is earlier than the late first century BC, while the major lives of Arrian and Plutarch date from the early second century AD, three to four hundred years after the death of Alexander. These authors did use earlier sources, some from participants in the campaign itself, including Callisthenes and the memoirs of Alexander's general, Ptolemy, but it has proved impossible to disentangle and evaluate these accounts. (Arrian's was so popular that many of the earlier sources on which he had relied were discarded and lost to future generations.) As the painstaking analysis of these sources by the historian A. B. Bosworth has shown, Alexander's exploits, as they have come down to us, are encrusted with later legend. This legend has persisted so that as recently as 1948 the historian William Tarn was able to argue (in his *Alexander*, Cambridge, 1948) that 'Alexander lifted the civilized world out of one groove and set it in another'. Today historians, more sensitive to imperialist propaganda, offer a more restrained assessment of Alexander's achievements. Bosworth's sober analysis has been particularly influential here.

The Conquest of the Western Persian Empire

The army marched in the spring of 334. Alexander was aware from the beginning of the Homeric nature of a campaign onto the Asian mainland near Troy. Once on Asian soil he offered honours to the memory of Achilles from whom he claimed descent. The Trojans were now enlisted as honorary Greeks united with the mainland Greeks against the barbarians and the small settlement on the site of Troy was showered with gifts.

Almost immediately Alexander faced his first battle. The local Persian commanders had drawn up their forces on the far side of the river Granicus. The river was a difficult obstacle with deep banks and the Persians must have hoped they would be able to pick off the Macedonians with their cavalry as they crossed. In the event the vanguard of the Macedonian cavalry managed to get across and hold off the Persian charges while Alexander and the bulk of cavalry made their crossing. Alexander led the next charge. The whole campaign was put in jeopardy when he almost got struck down in the *mêlée*, but he was rescued by Cleitus the Black, one of the commanders of the Companions, and the Persian cavalry was gradually pushed back. Then the Macedonian infantry moved in to surround the Persians. Their weapons and discipline proved so superior that the result was a massacre with perhaps nine-tenths of the enemy infantry left dead. Many were Greek mercenaries who offered to surrender. However, Alexander, determined to give a lesson to other Greeks, refused to spare them.

The victory at Granicus was so decisive that it left the coastline of Asia Minor with all the cities of Ionia open to Alexander. The march was now southwards, first to the administrative centre of Sardis, capital of the old kingdom of Lydia, then through some of the great cities of the coast, Ephesus, Priene, and Miletus with its fine harbour (now completely silted up), where a Persian garrison briefly resisted until overcome and massacred. Alexander knew that these cities had to be held to prevent the Persians using them as harbours for a counter-attack in the Aegean while he was moving inland. There had to be some recognition of these cities' liberation. They were released from their Persian tribute and encouraged to set up democratic governments. A promise by Alexander to contribute to Priene's building of her fine temple to Athena Polias survives on stone (and is now in the British Museum). However, Alexander could not resist meddling in the internal affairs of these cities, and 'contributions' to his campaigns soon replaced the tribute they had paid to Persia.

Finally, Alexander reached Halicarnassus, the home town of Herodotus, historian of the Persian wars. Here the Persian garrison under Memnon of Rhodes, recently appointed by Darius III as commander of the west, was prepared to resist. There was bitter fighting along the walls of the city and Macedonian losses were heavy. The Persians finally withdrew into two citadels that could be freely supplied by sea, and with no effective naval forces at his command, Alexander was forced to leave the city unconquered. His hopes of securing his rear were dashed. Halicarnassus held out for another eighteen months, and the Persian fleet was able to sail freely in the Aegean. It was only the death of Memnon in 333 and the call by Darius for troops to come to his aid in the east that prevented the Persians holding large areas of the Aegean and perhaps even invading Greece.

Alexander left memories of this humiliation behind him (and they were glossed over by later chroniclers such as Arrian) and moved east across the rich plains of Pamphylia to the wealthy town of Aspendos (now famed for its magnificent theatre and aqueduct from the second century AD). The town was Greek in origin but it was still bullied into paying a vast sum in tribute. Troops were left to pacify the area

while Alexander turned northwards, through the rocky passes and uplands of Pisidia to Celaenae, the capital of Phrygia. Finally in March 333 he arrived at Gordium on the plains of central Turkey. Here took place one of those legendary events that have become central to any account of Alexander's life. There was an ancient wagon whose yoke was tied to its pole by a complicated knot. An oracle had prophesied that anyone who untangled the knot would be lord of all Asia. The story goes that Alexander was baffled at first, and then in a fit of impatience slashed through the knot with his sword. His 'achievement' was trumpeted as evidence of divine aid for the expedition.

However, even after a full year of campaigning and one crushing victory, Alexander was still on the fringes of the empire. Its heartland and its king Darius still lay ahead. Up on the great plains of Anatolia he now began to run short of food. The crops would not ripen until August, and news was also coming through that Darius was at last gathering his forces for a counter-attack. The only hope was to move southwards again to the more fertile plains of Cilicia. This meant crossing the rocky uplands of Cappadocia and forcing a narrow pass into the coastal plain. In fact the local Persian commander was so intent on destroying the ripening crops of the Cilician plains in advance of the Macedonian arrival that the pass was left virtually undefended and Alexander was soon through. He was in the Cilician capital Tarsus before the Persians could defend it. This was the first Persian city with treasure to plunder, but the exhilaration of the troops was dampened when Alexander caught a fever while bathing in the river and hovered for days between life and death.

His troops must have been highly apprehensive. Darius had been raising levies of troops all spring and summer. The bulk of his men were Persians and Medes, but one account suggests they were joined by as many as 30,000 Greek mercenaries. The total size of the army is unknown, but it must have easily outnumbered Alexander's, and Darius, a seasoned commander, remained confident he could crush the intruder. As the army set out from Babylon towards Cilicia, it was relaxed enough to be accompanied by the royal treasure and the princesses and concubines of the court.

The two armies met in September on the eastern end of the Cilician Plain just above the Gulf of Issus. In the manoeuvres before the battle Darius tried to get between Alexander and his supply lines, and he finally drew up his armies behind the river Pinarus, which flowed into the Gulf. It was not an ideal spot as there was too little space between the mountains and the sea to allow the Persians to fully deploy their superior numbers. The Macedonian attack was launched, as always, by Alexander personally at the head of his cavalry, which he had positioned on the right of the line opposite the Persian infantry. The attack was a success and the infantry fell back, allowing Alexander to bear left towards the centre where Darius himself was to be found. The two are shown facing each other in the wonderful mosaic of the battle found in a house in Pompeii (now in the Archaeological Museum in Naples). Elsewhere, however, things were not going well. The Persian cavalry charged and forced back the Thessalian cavalry on the Macedonians' left flank, while the Macedonian infantry became dangerously disorganized when crossing the stream.

What saved the day was the disintegration of Darius' bodyguard under the impact of the Macedonian cavalry. Darius was forced into flight and with his disappearance Persian morale collapsed. There was a headlong stampede, the Persian cavalry trampling back over their own infantry as they escaped. Figures passed down of 100,000 Persian dead as against 500 Macedonians are certainly an exaggeration but they suggest the perceived magnitude of the victory. The royal baggage train and the princesses as well as Darius' mother were appropriated by Alexander and he preserved them as if they had now become part of his own heritage. For the first time Alexander was able to reward his troops lavishly.

Darius' nerve was shaken by his defeat and for the first time he was prepared to negotiate. He sent to Alexander that he was prepared to treat Alexander as a friend and ally but was not ready to surrender any of his territory. Alexander refused. He would talk only when Darius came to him as a subject. This was an impossible humiliation for the Persian king and he began assembling another army. Meanwhile, Alexander chose not to move further inland but to continue south along the coast of Syria and towards Egypt, one of the richest prizes of the empire. It was also important to gain control of the entire coastline to stop it being used as a base for Persian counter-attacks on Greece although the Persian fleet had been defeated by Antigonus the One-eyed, one of Alexander's gifted Macedonian commanders.

The first Phoenician cities welcomed Alexander. However, at the city of Tyre, reached in February 332, there was a check. The old city on an island offshore housed a shrine to the city god Melqart. Alexander equated Melqart with his own 'ancestor' Heracles and demanded to be allowed to enter the shrine to worship. He was refused and had little option but to order the siege of the city. It seemed an impossible task. The island was skilfully defended and could call on help from the sea. For seven months Alexander had to deploy a large force and exercise every ingenuity, including the construction of floating siege towers, before the walls were breached. The retribution was terrible. Eight thousand defenders died and a further 2,000 were crucified. The survivors were dispersed and new inhabitants had to be sought from the interior to replace them.

The siege of Tyre suggested a lack of balance in Alexander's personality. He was beginning to see himself as something more than a human being, beyond the normal restraints of human behaviour. Perhaps he had absorbed something of this from his father. At Olympia, a year before his death, Philip had dedicated a small circular temple, the Philippeion, to himself and his family with Alexander among those portrayed in statues. It was just inside the sanctuary to Zeus and so an intrusion into the sacred space. The sense that Alexander himself was half divine was consolidated as he moved towards Egypt. By responding sensitively to Egyptian culture Alexander found himself welcomed as a liberator from the deeply resented rule of Persia. He was soon accorded the ancient honorific titles of the pharaohs, king of Upper and Lower Egypt, son of the sun god Ra, and went through a formal coronation at Memphis.

However, Alexander was more interested in the ancestry of Greek than Egyptian gods. In early 331 he made a difficult journey across the Libyan desert to the oracle

of Ammon at Siwah. Ammon was a local god but he was commonly equated with Zeus, and in his private consultation with the priests Alexander appeared to gain the belief that Zeus had recognized him as his own son. (Plutarch's story is that the intended greeting of the priests was 'child', *paidion*, but, not being Greek-speakers, they substituted an 's' to make *paidios* which Alexander gratefully interpreted as *pai Dios*, 'son of Zeus'.) It echoed earlier stories that had circulated in Macedonia that his conception had in fact been divine. (Olympias, different sources reported, had been impregnated by either a serpent or a thunderbolt.)

A distance between Alexander and his commanders was becoming apparent. Darius, brooding on his defeat, now offered Alexander his empire to the west of the Euphrates and an enormous ransom for his family. The commanders were eager to accept. It marked a massive extension of Macedonian territory that could now be consolidated in peace. Alexander refused. He was set on the humiliation of Darius and forced the Persian monarch to continue the war. He may have felt that his legitimacy as ruler of Persia could be achieved only by directly replacing Darius. This would explain the single-mindedness with which he was to hunt Darius down.

The Humiliation of Darius

The new army raised by Darius was almost exclusively made up of cavalry drawn from the centre and east of the empire. (What infantry there was, was of poor quality.) Arrian reported an unbelievable total of 400,000 horsemen: a more realistic estimate is 37,000, still probably five times as many as Alexander could muster. Darius took his men north into Assyria, and positioned his army where the cavalry could be used most effectively on the plain of Gaugamela, in the foothills of the Zagros mountains. Here Alexander followed him to arrive in September 331. It was clearly the most frightening situation he had yet faced. After resting his men, he drew up his army as before, the infantry in the centre, the Macedonian cavalry on the right, and the Thessalians on the left.

Battle was joined on 1 October when Alexander began moving his cavalry around the flank of the Persians. They counter-attacked and Alexander had to feed in more and more troops to contain them. As the Persians responded by sending yet more troops, Alexander finally saw what he had been waiting for, a gap opening between the Persian left and its centre. Rushing his Companions forward with infantry supporting them on each side, Alexander forced his way through the gap. Within a few moments the state of the battle was transformed as the Persian army was broken into two. Once again Darius fled with Alexander after him in a hot pursuit that lasted 30 kilometres before he called it off. As the news of Darius' flight filtered through, his army, still fighting well on the right flank, disintegrated behind him. It was another crushing victory, and Alexander could now rightly claim the title 'Lord of Asia'.

The Macedonians were now in the rich heartlands of the empire with no effective opposition to them left. The army moved southwards across the Mesopotamian

plains to Babylon and here, as in Egypt, Alexander was welcomed as a liberator from Persian rule. The city was wealthy, its treasures were surrendered to him, and the army relaxed in the sybaritic surroundings of the richest and most sophisticated of the cities of the east. Then there was a march of triumph on the great cities of the empire, now undefended against Alexander's armies. Susa, the second capital of the empire, surrendered without a fight, its satrap coming out to meet Alexander with racing camels and elephants as preliminary gifts. Inside the city awaited gold and silver bullion amounting to 40,000 talents. (These are vast sums; just two or three talents was enough to make a man very wealthy.) Included was loot taken from Greece 150 years before and a hundred tons of purple cloth. This was only the beginning. The army now moved south-east, over snow-capped mountains to Persepolis, the spiritual centre of the Achaemenid empire.

The riches of Persepolis had been accumulated over centuries and were vast. In Darius' bedchamber in his great palace alone, there were 8,000 talents of gold. Alexander now left his men free to loot, and the city was stripped of its treasures so effectively that its modern excavators have not found a single sizeable piece of gold or silver. A great column of camels and pack animals took off the spoils. Some were sent back to Susa, others stayed with the army. In total perhaps 120,000 talents of treasure was taken, a revenue that it would have taken the Athenian empire at its height 300 years to collect in tribute. Only the great palace of Xerxes was left intact, but in May 330 this too was sacked. One legend says that an Athenian courtesan, by the name of Thais, egged on the Macedonian leaders with whom she had been drinking to fire the palace in revenge for the destruction of Athens. Archaeologists working on the site this century have found the blackened remains of the roof timbers.

Alexander was now obsessed with the capture of Darius. The king had taken refuge in Ecbatana, the capital of the Medes. Alexander followed him there and in a series of forced marches pursued him eastwards. As Darius fled his position weakened. He had never visited the east of his empire before, and the local satraps would give no allegiance to a man so tainted by defeat. One of them, Bessus, satrap of Bactria and a leading cavalry commander at Gaugamela, finally took him captive. As Alexander's cavalry moved in, Darius was stabbed and left to die. Alexander arrived shortly afterwards to take possession of the last of the Achaemenids. The body was sent back for burial in Persepolis. Alexander had achieved his victory, not least because he could claim a physical transfer of power from a dead and defeated enemy to his own over-sized personality.

The Campaigns of the East

As Alexander moved eastwards his own position became less secure. His men had achieved victory beyond their wildest dreams and they had little stomach for further marches into the unknown. Tension grew among the army commanders and Alexander became increasingly impatient with it. In the autumn of 330 he accused the brilliant but overbearing leader of the cavalry, Philotas, of conspiracy to murder

him. The army was bullied into voting for his torture and execution. Philotas' father Parmenion, one of Philip's most seasoned commanders, who had consistently opposed what he saw as Alexander's recklessness, was also assassinated on Alexander's orders. The cavalry was gradually reorganized so that the power of individual commanders was reduced, and Alexander began to rely on local mercenaries rather than sending back to Macedonia for reinforcements.

The next two years saw campaigning of a very different nature. Alexander had reached the remotest reaches of the empire, the provinces of Bactria and Sogdiana, roughly modern Afghanistan, and there were new, intense stresses on his men. The heights of the Hindu Kush were crossed in April 329 with men suffering from frost-bite and breathlessness. They then had to march over 80 kilometres of desert before reaching the Oxus river, where many died from sudden overdrinking. Alexander's adversary was Bessus, who had proclaimed himself the new king of Persia. He was eventually hunted down, and taken to the city of Bactra to have his nose and ears mutilated, the traditional punishment for a usurper of the Persian throne, before being sent back to Ecbatana for execution.

This region was unstable, and local magnates bitterly resented the intrusion of Alexander and his army. While Alexander was campaigning along the north-eastern borders of the empire, there was a massive insurrection in the satrapy of Bactria to the south. This region was ideal for guerrilla warfare. The insurrection spread, and for the next two years Alexander was tied up in a series of campaigns against local pockets of resistance. As ever, Alexander showed his inventiveness and flexibility. His archers and javelin men came into their own against the bands of nomadic tribesmen who circled the Macedonian armies. Even the most impregnable of citadels fell to his tactics. One noble, Ariamazes, thought himself invulnerable in his mountain fortress until Alexander sent 400 mountaineers to take it from above. However, the final conquest of the region was marked by scenes of terror as the entire male populations of captured cities were massacred and their women and children enslaved. Ten thousand infantry and 3,500 horsemen had to be left in Bactria to keep order, and a string of military garrisons was established. In a more constructive move, 30,000 young men were taken to be taught Greek and trained for Alexander's armies. Bactria was to become and remain an enclave of Greek culture for centuries to come (but see earlier, pp. 13–15). It was also here that Alexander selected a wife for himself, Roxane, daughter of Oxyartes, a local noble. The relationship has been idealized in legend but Alexander was far too single-minded to be lured into romantic attachments.

The combined effects of the stresses of the campaigns and Alexander's own personality were now causing serious problems within his court. When the army was resting at Maracanda (the modern Samarkand) in the autumn of 328, a row broke out at a drunken banquet, between Alexander and the cavalry commander Cleitus, who had saved Alexander's life at the Granicus. It was said that Cleitus taunted Alexander. Alexander in response seized a weapon and struck Cleitus down.

The row concealed more deep-rooted tensions. The Macedonian kingship was one in which personal loyalty to the king persisted alongside a rough camaraderie. The king was not removed from his commanders—he ate and drank, often heavily,

alongside them. The tradition of the Persian monarchy was very different. Here the king lived in ostentatious splendour and even the most senior of his courtiers were treated as subjects. The whole approach was symbolized by the act of *proskynesis*, a traditional obeisance of a subject before his king. Alexander, whose temperament was always autocratic, had now begun to insist on this for himself. The Macedonian commanders, already resentful of the way that Alexander had appropriated all credit for military success to himself, deeply resented submission to what was for them a humiliating ritual. Their open opposition was such that Alexander gave way but hostility lingered and gave rise to an assassination plan by his closest attendants. The plan was discovered, the pages involved executed. They were followed by the historian Callisthenes who had offered the most articulate condemnation of *proskynesis*.

The tension was increased by Alexander's refusal to turn back. Still ahead of him lay India. Knowledge of the region was shadowy. Nominally it had been part of the Persian empire and there had been elephants from the Kabul valley in Darius' army at Gaugamela. The Greeks had myths that both Heracles and Dionysus originated in India, and Alexander may have been spurred on to equal their exploits. In 327 he crossed the passes of the Hindu Kush and down through the Cophen valley. It was a progress marked by terror. Any city that resisted was stormed and its men massacred. The valley, the corridor between India and the west, had to be held by whatever means. Only one city, known to the Greeks as Nysa, was spared after a successful claim that it was no less than the birthplace of the god Dionysus!

The wealthy kingdoms of India were now within the reach of Alexander. The Indus river was crossed amidst great celebrations and games in the spring of 326. Alexander was welcomed by the ruler of the state of Taxila, whose motives appear to have been to use the Macedonians to defeat rival princes further east. The bait worked. Hearing news that one of them, Porus, was prepared to resist him from behind the river Jhelum (Greek: Hydaspes), a tributary of the Indus, Alexander hurried eastwards before the melting of the winter snows and imminent monsoons made the river impassable.

The Battle of Hydaspes proved one of Alexander's most crushing victories. The challenge lay in crossing a river that was well guarded by Porus' troops. Alexander succeeded by crossing during a thunderstorm, and his men landed virtually unopposed. He now faced 20,000 Indian infantry, 2,000 cavalry, and a mass of elephants that could be stampeded into the Macedonian ranks. The Macedonian cavalry charged the Indian and forced it back into the infantry. The Macedonian infantry now advanced in superb discipline. They opened their ranks as the elephants charged and then jabbed at them with their *sarissae*. The crazed animals stampeded back into their own lines, trampling down anyone caught in the way. The Indian infantry was now slaughtered, only a few breaking through the Macedonians to escape. Porus was captured, still seated on an enormous elephant but wounded and almost alone on the battlefield. Alexander, impressed with his courage and physical presence, confirmed him as ruler of his kingdom.

Buoyed up by yet another victory Alexander forced his men on. There were legends of rich kingdoms to the east, but the monsoons had now started. By the

time the army reached the river Hyphasis (today's river Beas) it had endured seventy days of continuous heavy rainfall and was close to mutiny. For the first time in his life, Alexander accepted defeat. He claimed that a sacrifice had shown the gods did not want him to continue further and ordered the retreat. There was a jubilation in the ranks which Alexander was never to forget or forgive.

The March Home

The route home was not to be through the conquered territories of the eastern empire but southwards on a flotilla down the Indus to the Southern Ocean, which Alexander was determined to explore. Even though the waters of the Indus were falling when the expedition set out in November 326, it still remained a hazardous journey. The tribes along the river were uniformly hostile and their cities had to be stormed. Alexander himself almost lost his life when an Indian arrow penetrated his chest when he was isolated on a city wall during one siege. He never properly recovered from the wound. Meanwhile, the frightened and exhausted army survived only by using terror. Such hatred was raised against the intruders that every Macedonian garrison left in the area was later wiped out.

The army reached the mouth of the Indus in July 325. A long march westward across the wind-scoured and dusty wilderness of the Makran desert lay ahead. Whole armies had been swallowed up in the desert in the past, and it may have been Alexander's obsession with surpassing all his forebears that drove him on. The crossing of the Makran took sixty days. It was a shattered and thoroughly demoralized force that finally reached the satrapy of Carmania, north of the straits of Hormuz. From here it was a relatively short march back to Persepolis and the heartland of the Persian empire. The fleet returned separately under its Cretan commander Nearchus, a boyhood friend of Alexander. This was a more notable achievement. Nearchus scavenged his way along the coast and reached the Tigris without the loss of a single ship. Alexander was so impressed he began dreaming of great future voyages—a circumnavigation of Africa and perhaps even the conquest of the western Mediterranean.

Administering the Empire

Alexander was now 31. He had survived fevers and wounds but each must have weakened his extraordinary constitution. Heavy drinking with his commanders was doing further damage. Yet the immense task of consolidating his conquests lay ahead. After his victories those Persian satraps who had pledged loyalty had been allowed to remain in place with Macedonians appointed alongside them as military commanders and collectors of taxes. However, with plunder available to meet all his needs Alexander had paid little attention to good government. In his absence corruption and oppression had increased. In a frenzied purge over the winter of

325/324, Alexander dismissed most of the Persians, replacing them with Macedonians. At the same time Macedonian commanders in Media, who were accused by local notables of sacrilege and rape, were summoned to Alexander and executed. An atmosphere of fear spread through the empire as a response to Alexander's increasingly unbalanced behaviour.

The Macedonians may well have wondered what their position in the new empire would be. In February 324 Alexander reached Susa, and here he set himself up in the style of the Persian monarchy. He now wore the white-striped purple tunic of the kings with the Persian diadem. Darius' royal bodyguard was re-formed and served alongside Alexander's own Macedonian guard. Then the 30,000 Bactrian youths whom Alexander had left to be trained in Macedonian drill and tactics arrived. They were an impressive force and a potential challenge to the battleworn Macedonian forces. Yet Alexander still seemed to believe in an inherent Macedonian racial superiority that could be imposed through the mixing of Macedonian and Persian blood. He took two more Persian wives, one a daughter of Darius, for himself, and in a ceremony of glittering extravagance married off ninety of his commanders to daughters of the Persian nobility. The strategy was ill judged and few of the marriages lasted.

In the spring of 324 Alexander left Susa for the Persian Gulf. From here he sailed up the Tigris into Mesopotamia. At one of the inland coastal towns, Opis, he announced that all Macedonians who were unfit for further service because of age or injury would be demobbed and allowed to return home. It was a sensible move. The men had been ten years away from home and there would be time to replace them with fresh troops from Macedonia before the next campaigning season began. In the circumstances it was seen as a gesture of rejection. There were shouts of anger, even taunts that Alexander should go it alone with his father Zeus. Alexander's nerve gave way. Thirteen of the ringleaders were executed and replaced by Persians. At this the mutiny collapsed and, as the tension broke, there was an emotional reconciliation. Ten thousand men were discharged, but each was sent home with a handsome payment.

Alexander's behaviour became increasingly absolutist. At the Olympic Games of 324 BC a letter from him was read out which proclaimed that all Greek exiles could return to their native cities. There were many thousands whom misfortune, political upheavals, and power struggles had driven from their cities. (Twenty thousand alone turned up at Olympia to hear the decree being read out.) Alexander may have been trying to win popularity by sending them home, but he had made no consultation with the cities and the result was to disrupt their economies and political stability as the exiles returned. Once again he had shown how detached he had become from political reality.

The summer heat now drove Alexander and the enormous entourage that travelled with him northwards to the cooler air of the Zagros mountains. His destination was the old summer residence of the Persian kings at Ecbatana in Media. The satrap welcomed him with unparalleled extravagance and there were heavy feasting and games. A casualty of one drinking session was Hephaestion, one of the few

Companions who had remained an intimate of Alexander's despite all the stresses and hardships of the campaigns. Alexander was devastated. He ordered the execution of Hephaestion's physician and, in a manner contemporaries compared to Achilles' grief for Patroclus, he fasted over the body for three days. A cult was to be set up to honour the dead hero and plans put in order for the building of a vast monument at Babylon, where the court made its way in early 323.

Alexander's grief for Hephaestion showed how, in the last year of his life, he seems increasingly to have lost touch with reality. Whether he actually believed he was a god or not, he certainly associated himself with symbols of divinity. On coins minted at Babylon he is depicted with a thunderbolt, the emblem of Zeus, in his hand. At banquets he wore the purple robes and ram's horns of Zeus Ammon, and one account talks of incense being burnt before him. There is some evidence that the Greek cities were ordered to give him divine status (a debate, the result of which is unknown, took place on the subject in Athens). What is certain is that the Hellenistic monarchs, and following them the emperors of Rome, learned from Alexander the importance of claiming and advertising divine support in a way never known before in the Greek world.

Alexander remained in Babylon to plan an invasion of Arabia. The riches of the Arabian peninsula were legendary and reconnaissance of the area suggested settlement there would be possible as well. During the early months of 323 a vast harbour, able to take 1,000 warships, was being dredged out of the Euphrates and men were being gathered from the empire. There were also rumours that once Alexander had conquered the peninsula he would turn west into the Mediterranean, and a stream of embassies, from Greece, Etruria, Libya, Carthage, and even, it was said, Spain, made their way to Babylon to offer reverence.

The end to this frenetic activity came suddenly. One evening late in May 323 Alexander was drinking with his companions. In one final bout he is said to have drunk the contents of a bowl that could take twelve pints. According to one account, which may have been trying to prove that he was poisoned, he collapsed and died almost immediately. Other sources say that he lingered on alive for several days. Whatever the reality of his illness, by 10 June he was dead. In Athens they could not believe the reports. If he was, surely the whole world would stink from his corpse, said the Athenian politician Demades. A revolt in Athens which greeted the news (a sign if any was needed of how far Alexander had alienated himself from the Greek world) was put down by Macedonian troops and by the next year, 322, Athenian democracy was finally extinguished.

The New Graeco-Macedonian World

Alexander's empire was a personal conquest. It had never gained an institutional framework that could bring such diverse elements as Macedonia, Egypt, Persia, and India together into a cohesive unity. There was not even an immediate successor. When asked on his deathbed to whom his position should go, Alexander apparently

answered, 'To the strongest'. The legitimate heir was Alexander's half-brother, Arrhidaeus, but he was retarded. Roxane was pregnant and duly produced a son. Proclaimed as Alexander IV of Macedonia, he could never be more than a puppet figure. The inevitable result was a power struggle between Alexander's generals that was to last for twenty years. The dominant figures were first Perdiccas, the senior cavalry officer, and, after Perdiccas' death in 320, Antigonus the One-Eyed, who had been appointed satrap of Phrygia in 333. Antigonus struggled to maintain overall control of the empire until he was defeated and killed in 301.

The most shrewd of the competitors for Alexander's empire was Ptolemy, who, appointed as governor of Egypt after Alexander's death, simply consolidated his position as ruler while other generals fought over the rest of the empire. He also managed to grab the most sacred relic of all, Alexander's embalmed body, which he installed at Memphis (later moving it to Alexandria). Ptolemy could not be dislodged, and he formally declared himself king around 305, so founding a dynasty that lasted until 30 BC. In Asia Seleucus, the commander of one of Alexander's elite regiments, emerged as victor. He also declared himself king in 305 proclaiming his own divine heritage as the son of Apollo. His kingdom was an unwieldy one, with Greeks, Persians, Babylonians, and all the varied peoples and cultures of the eastern provinces under his rule. It proved impossible to keep intact. The dynasty lost land continually until it was eventually confined to a small area of northern Syria, where the last of the Seleucid kings succumbed to Rome in 64 BC.

The third kingdom and the most prestigious for the heirs of Alexander was Macedonia, the only one where kings were to rule over their native people. The land was fiercely contested until 276 BC, when Antigonus Gonatas, grandson of Antigonus the One-Eyed, achieved control. He constructed a great palace at Aigai and may have been responsible for completing the royal tombs there. His dynasty remained in power until the Romans occupied Macedonia in the second century BC. The country never recovered after the wars of Alexander, and few of its men ever returned home. They had either died, remained as settlers, or become mercenaries.

Another of Alexander's legacies was the cities left behind him along the routes of his campaigns. Several, perhaps twelve, were founded during his lifetime. While one of them, Alexandria in Egypt, dedicated in the spring of 331, was destined to become one of the greatest cities of the Mediterranean world, others were little more than military garrisons in the conquered territories. Most were east of the Tigris in regions where cities had been rare. Alexandria-in-Caucaso in the Hindu Kush, for instance, was made up of 3,000 Graeco-Macedonian soldiers, some volunteer settlers, others discarded soldiers, supported by 7,000 locals who worked as labourers for them. Such cities were isolated, thousands of kilometres from Greece, among a hostile population, and with all the discomforts associated with pioneer life. Many failed completely, but others (such as Ai Khanoum) maintained themselves as enclaves of Greek culture for generations. (Robin Waterfield, *Dividing the Spoils: The War for Alexander the Great's Empire*, Oxford and New York, 2011, deals well with this complicated period.)

The Legacy

Conquering by force of arms those whom he could not bring together by reasoned persuasion, he brought men from everywhere into a unified body mixed together as if in a loving cup, their lives and characters and marriage and social customs. He commanded them all to think of the inhabited world as their fatherland, of the encamped army as their acropolis and their guard.

The hymn of praise to Alexander by the Greek writer Plutarch is still to be found quoted in biographies of the conqueror (such as that by William Tarn, Cambridge, 1948) as if it represented historical truth. Yet like so many classical texts it had a different purpose. It was an exercise in rhetoric and it is clear from other writings of Plutarch, including his biography of Alexander, that he did not himself believe in this adulation. Even so this image of Alexander persists and it underlies the assumption that Alexander was bringing a superior civilization from the west to a more barbarous one in the east. 'This superiority of a small, noble, and free people over all of enslaved Asia is perhaps the most glorious thing among men,' was the eighteenth-century French Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire's assessment.

It is impossible, in fact, to envisage how Alexander saw himself within the cultural matrix of his times. There was the Macedonian inheritance, of course, but he was profoundly drawn too to the cultural heritage of Greece. He sunk himself in the great Greek writers and surrounded himself with Greek courtiers. His crusade against Persia was Panhellenic in conception, a revenge for the audacity of the Persian invasions of the fifth century. Yet even though he was prepared to send back looted Greek works of art to Athens, Alexander had no conception of restoring the liberty of the Greeks and certainly, in Athens at least, he was hated for the contempt with which he treated Greece. So Voltaire's assessment that Alexander was consciously bringing a superior civilization to the east can hardly be supported. It took generations for Greek culture to slowly infiltrate downwards as a by-product of Alexander's conquests rather than as the result of a far-seeing strategy.

It is also difficult to know how Alexander envisaged the cultural mix of Persian, Greek, and Macedonian that he left behind in Persia. There were suspicions between each of the three groups and unresolved issues of the hierarchy of relationships between them. It is hard to know how any kind of harmonious government could have emerged, especially as Alexander's judgement was being clouded by his own excesses and fantasies and his insistence on being seen as divine. That Alexander's immediate legacy was not a stable empire can be seen by the ease with which it broke up into separate kingdoms, largely, of course, because he had not planned an orderly succession. What he had created, rather, was a form of monarchy, based on absolute power, an aura of divinity, and conspicuous consumption. This was to be the model he bequeathed to the Hellenistic kings who succeeded him.

Alexander also became the archetype of the world conqueror. This was not only because of his stunning military exploits but the archetype was sustained for future generations by Alexander's projection of himself as romantic hero through the works of his favourite sculptor Lysippus. He asked to be shown beardless, a sign of

youth and vigour, and his chosen pose was to look slightly upwards, his gaze distant (the so-called 'melting look'). In the first century BC the Roman general Pompey added Magnus, 'the Great', to his name in emulation of Alexander and even aped his mannerisms (and, in one portrait bust, his hair-cut!). Trajan took Roman armies to the mouth of the Euphrates and then bemoaned the fact he could not take them further and equal the exploits of his hero, Alexander. At his inauguration of Constantinople, his capital in the east, the emperor Constantine portrayed himself on his coins with the 'melting look' of Alexander. The man who conquered the Christian city of Constantinople some 1,100 years later, the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II, was an avid reader of Arrian's panegyric *Life of Alexander* and boasted that while Alexander had conquered Asia from west to east, he had completed the conquest from east to west. So Alexander haunted generations of later military commanders. (For the images of Alexander, see Andrew Stewart, *Faces of Power: Alexander's Image and Hellenistic Politics*, Berkeley and London, 1993.)

Ultimately, the real Alexander eludes us. He was, in any sense of the word, super-human. He was imbued with an indomitable curiosity and urge to reach to the limits of what was humanly possible; *pothos*, 'yearning' was the word used by his biographer Arrian. For many men, such yearnings would have remained in the land of fantasy. It was the inheritance of his father's crack army and superb skills of generalship that gave him an opportunity, rare in history, actually to fulfil his *pothos* over an unimaginably large geographical region. There was extraordinary luck: any one of a number of wounds or crises could have killed him when he was leading his men from the front. Yet, like anyone far removed from the normal restraints of living, it was all too easy for a conception of himself as quasi-divine to predominate and for him to act with amoral ruthlessness when thwarted. The more attractive, intellectually curious, facets of his personality that Aristotle may have stimulated were submerged. His death was probably a blessing for those who would have been his subjects but even when it came as early as it did the world of Asia and the eastern Mediterranean had been shaken by his conquests into new patterns of rule.

The Hellenistic age is the period from the reign of Alexander (336–323 BC) to the conquest of Egypt by Rome in 30 BC, a span of some 300 years. Long disregarded as a decadent interlude between the death of Alexander and the rise of Rome, it is now seen as one of the most fascinating periods of Greek history, where the interplay between Greeks and non-Greeks, creativity in the arts, and an intense interest in the sciences stimulated a wide range of intellectual, social, and cultural developments.

It was an age of monarchies. It was unlikely, in fact, that any other form of government would have held together the different factions, races, and cultures that now had to coexist in the expanded Graeco-Macedonian world. (The distinctions between the two cultures faded with time and a relatively homogeneous Greek culture emerged.) Inevitably, the atmosphere was very different from that of the age of the city-states. Many of the old cities of mainland Greece continued to exist as important, even influential, political and cultural centres but political power now rested with the strong men who had carved kingdoms from the conquests of Alexander. (Andrew Erskine (ed.), *A Companion to the Hellenistic World*, Malden, Mass., and Oxford, 2005, is exceptional. See also Graham Shipley, *The Greek World after Alexander, 323–30 B.C.*, New York and London, 2000.)

The Hellenistic Monarchies

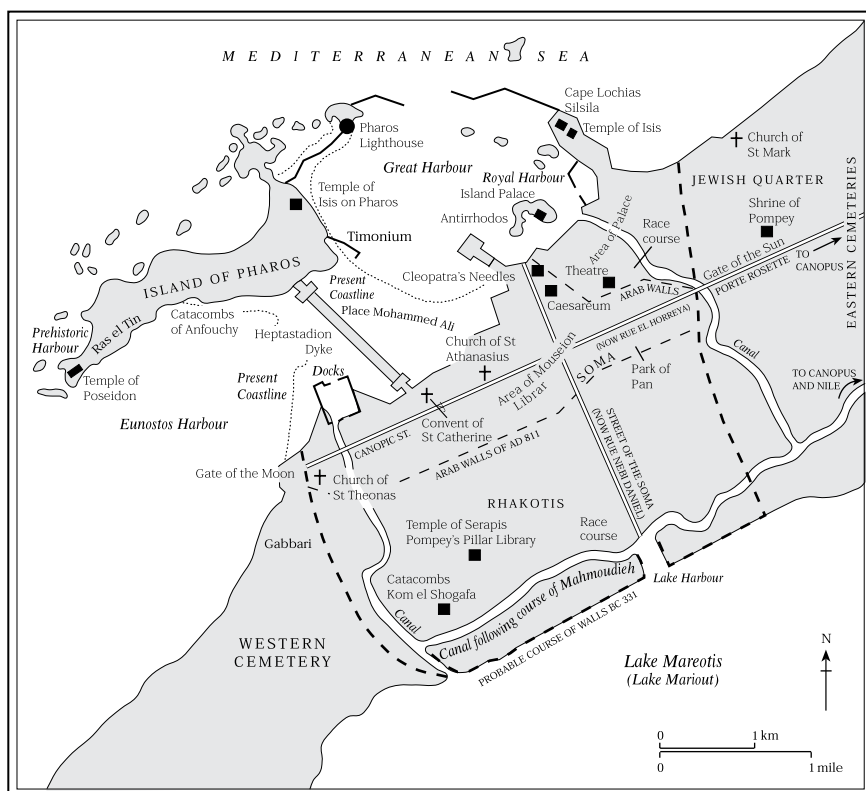
The typical Hellenistic monarch had to be a military commander, his territories often referred to as ‘spear-won land’. Armies were large, up to 80,000 men, mostly mercenaries, a size that was not surpassed until modern times. The boundaries between each kingdom remained fluid and there were frequent disputes between rival monarchs over their extent. The Ptolemies and the Seleucids fought no less than five wars over Syria in the third century (despite having access to the wealth of Egypt, the Ptolemies desperately needed other resources such as timber from the Mediterranean and they clung doggedly to their possessions there). In addition to these inter-dynastic conflicts there were constant attacks by outsiders. Macedonia had to guard her northern frontiers against the tribes of central Europe. ‘Celtic’ war bands (see Interlude 5) raided down into Greece in the early third century, sacking

Delphi in 279, and it was only by successfully confronting them that Antigonus Gonatas secured the kingdom of Macedonia for himself in 277. Another Celtic people, the Galatians, settled in central Anatolia, and Attalus I's defeat of them in 238 earned him the prestige that enabled him to set himself up as king of Pergamum in the north-west of Asia Minor. (See Stephen Mitchell, 'The Galatians: Representation and Reality', in Erskine (ed.), *Companion to the Hellenistic World*.)

Attalus' successors, the Attalids, were typical in developing a heroic history to support the triumph of their dynasty. They traced their past back to one Telephus, a son of Heracles who himself remained an iconic figure in this period. One of the great sculptural pieces of the period, the Altar of Zeus at their capital Pergamum, celebrated Attalus' achievements. On its colossal frieze, 100 metres long, the Attalids, portrayed as gods, battle it out against giants, the Galatians, with the exploits of Telephus also shown among the reliefs. The celebrated statue of the Dying Gaul (the Romans knew the Celts as Gauls) was executed, originally in bronze, at Pergamum at this time. (The surviving example in the Capitoline Museum in Rome is a Roman copy in marble.)

The most harassed of the kings were the Seleucids who faced the challenge of retaining vast tracts of eastern Asia. Their legitimacy as rulers was always flimsy. Apollo was their god, alien to the mass of their subjects. Their survival rested ultimately on their military prowess but the task was beyond them. The history of their kingdom is one of steady loss of the territories originally grabbed by Seleucus I from Alexander's empire. Only two members of the dynasty died outside battle. Control of the far east of their kingdom was lost with the breakaway of Bactria in the mid-third century, a state whose history is still obscure. (See Frank Holt, *Lost World of the Golden King: In Search of Ancient Afghanistan*, Berkeley and London, 2012.) In the remote north of their kingdom a Parthian ruler, Arsaces, became prominent at the same time. His horsemen were versatile enough to fight either as cavalry or archers and they were soon raiding southwards with success. The campaigns of Antiochus III (ruled 223–187 BC) in the east did something to restore Seleucid prestige in Asia and the dynasty did survive for a further hundred years. Yet, by the second century BC the Parthians had reached the Euphrates, and by the end of the century the Seleucids had been reduced by Roman expansionism and successful Jewish nationalism (see below) to a small area of Syria. The kingdom was finally extinguished by Pompey the Great in 64 BC (see below, pp. 412–13).

The Hellenistic monarchs ruled over such a variety of peoples that they had to take an active role in mobilizing support. One way this could be done was through patronage. The tradition of providing 'bread and circuses' for the masses began in this period, while at a more elevated level the kings offered hospitality in their courts to 'Friends' who might come from any part of the Greek world. Normally they would have skills, as philosophers, poets, doctors, or administrators, and gradually they became assimilated as courtiers in courts that themselves became centres of culture and display. The Ptolemies in Alexandria, by far the most successful of Alexander's foundations, knew exactly how to exploit their surplus of resources for propaganda purposes. One festival thrown in honour of Dionysus by Ptolemy II in



MAP 7 Alexandria, from Hellenistic capital to major bishopric. Alexandria was the capital of the Ptolemies and as such a major centre of patronage as shown in the royal palaces, which were along the sea front, and in the neighbouring Library. It was a major centre for Greek mathematics and science. It also became the major port of the eastern Mediterranean, notably through the export of Egypt's grain surpluses. Note the famous lighthouse (Pharos). The evangelist Mark was, by tradition, buried here and this made the city an important Christian city. St Athanasius (note his church) had a turbulent career as the city's bishop in the fourth century but is honoured for his championship of the Nicene creed. The Jewish community was also important and in Philo (early first century AD) produced a major philosopher.

Alexandria in 275 was the height of flamboyance. The glint of gold was everywhere, in the plates on which 120 young boys bore offerings, in great mixing-bowls for wine, and in gilded statues carried in procession. Exotic animals, including a giraffe, a rhinoceros, and elephants, mingled with an enormous phallus, the symbol of the Dionysiac orgy, which was carried through the streets decorated with gold ribbons and bows. A vast pavilion was erected for special guests at which all the fittings, even the couches, were made of gold.

So the courts were opulent places, not least in their architectural settings. The accent was on the exotic and monumental. Alexandria, whose extravagance was

sustained by the vast wealth of Egypt and a bustling port, was the most cosmopolitan and luxury-loving, but it was also the intellectual capital of the Hellenistic world and home to the greatest library of the ancient world (see further below, pp. 344–5). At Pergamum the Attalids built their own complex of great public buildings, terrace and temple succeeding each other as one ascended the heights towards the palace that provided a magnificent if rather overwhelming backdrop to the dynasty. The city's theatre offered, and still offers, superb views over the surrounding countryside.

Cities in the Hellenistic World

Crucial to the spread of Hellenism was the founding of cities, a tradition originally used as a strategy by the Macedonians for pacifying defeated enemies and sustained by Philip as well as by Alexander. The Seleucids scattered new foundations throughout the former Persian empire, in Syria, and Palestine, on the plains of Mesopotamia, on the shores of the Persian Gulf, and as far east as modern Afghanistan. Some, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, for example, were totally new cities. Others, such as Babylon and Susa, were older cities whose native inhabitants were now placed under Greek or Macedonian administrations. It took some time for many of these cities to become established, but by the third century adventurers, traders, and political refugees were migrating eastwards, shedding their old city allegiances to become citizens of this new world. There were new cities elsewhere: Thessalonica on the Macedonian coast was founded in 316. Greek trading ports were established along the coastline of the Red Sea.

Typically these cities were laid out on a gridiron pattern. This was not just an exercise in proportion, it was the most practical way of placing buildings that were usually rectangular in area (houses, for instance, were normally grouped around a rectangular courtyard), and the effect was not necessarily monotonous. Priene, a city on the western coast of Asia Minor, resited on higher ground in the fourth century, was one of the finest examples. Its streets ran up a hillside to the public buildings of the city with an innovative temple to Athene Polias, mixing Ionic and Doric elements, gracing the summit of the acropolis. (Priene remains an excellent choice to visit as it was never built over in Roman times.) All these foundations, however distant from Greece itself, were microcosms of Greek culture. Even Alexander's military settlements had their own gymnasia and theatres. By the second century, when colonization had become more popular, a city such as that excavated at Ai Khanoum on the northern frontier of Afghanistan had not only a huge theatre and gymnasium but mosaics and a library. Among the ruins were found the remnants of a piece of papyrus with a Greek philosophical text on it, while in the gymnasium a stone pillar was inscribed with moral maxims taken from the oracle at Delphi.

So far as written records of a settlement's foundation are concerned, none can rival the Zenon archive, 2,000 documents dealing with every aspect of one Egyptian estate's management in the third century BC. Zenon was one of the administrators of this estate, land situated between the Nile valley and the Fayum granted by Ptolemy II to a favoured courtier. The agricultural land itself and the neighbouring



MAP 8



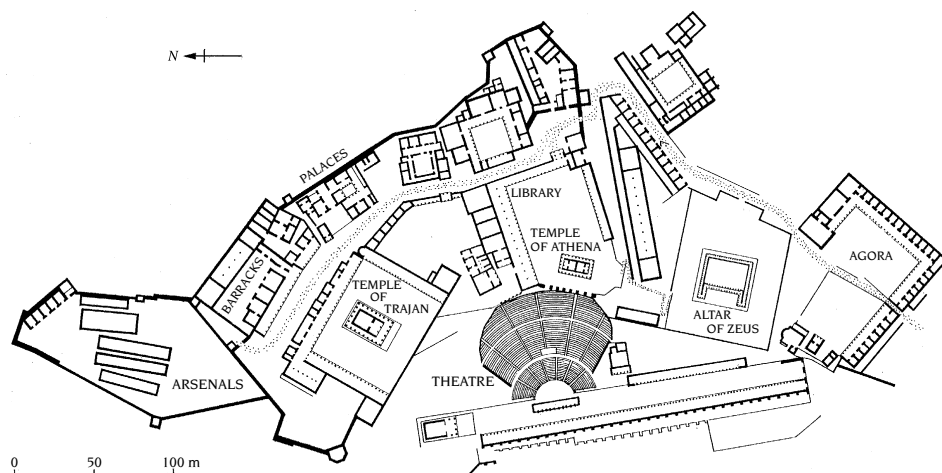


FIG. 6 The Acropolis at Pergamum. In addition to its temples the Acropolis shows the typical concerns of a Hellenistic monarch, for defence (arsenals and barracks) and for culture (a library and theatre). Unlike an earlier Greek acropolis it also holds a royal palace.

town, Philadelphia, were both set out as rectangular plans, with irrigation canals and separate plots for selected crops, vines, olives, wheat, and even poppies. The temples in Philadelphia honoured Greek and Egyptian gods as well as the Ptolemies themselves. As with Ai Khanoum, there was a theatre and gymnasium.

The gymnasium was the most typical symbol of Greek culture. It was not simply a place for exercise. There were often libraries and lecture halls attached with classes held in rhetoric or philosophy. The most favoured gymnasia, especially those in the older cities such as Athens, were exclusive. They had long waiting-lists, and prospective entrants were carefully scrutinized for their suitability. Freeborn citizens whose income came from land were the most favoured, and there was a distinct prejudice against trade, a sign in itself that this was an important source of new wealth resented by more traditional landowners.

Philip and Alexander had perfected the art of siege warfare and there was no city that could withstand a determined attack on it. The Romans simply razed the prosperous port of Corinth to the ground in 146 when they wanted to set an example to resisters of Roman expansion. However, there was little sense in a Hellenistic ruler destroying the main centres of Greek culture, so in practice there had to be accommodation between king and city. Sensible kings paid lip-service to the traditions of the *polis* (it was part of the ideology of monarchical rule that a king would boast of his preservation of city independence) and city life remained vigorous. We are especially lucky to have a host of surviving inscriptions that record major events, honour benefactors, and detail arrangements for financing new buildings. Democratic assemblies continued to meet, day-to-day administration would be in the hands of appointed officials (maintaining grain supplies was a constant preoccupation), and ambassadors would be sent off to resolve disputes with neighbours. The cities themselves realized the

futility of warfare among themselves—it would only attract the unwelcome attentions of the monarchs—and so arbitration of their differences became common instead.

The cities of the Greek mainland were not formally part of any of the Hellenistic kingdoms (for Macedonia, see further p. 389 below) and they saw the advantages in joining together for common defence against outsiders. In central Greece the Aetolian League gained its cohesion from a successful defence of the area against Celtic war bands. After saving Delphi in 279, the Aetolians absorbed most of the cities of the Amphictyonic Council (see p. 311). The League was a genuine federation. All its men of military age met twice a year in an assembly, there was a chief magistrate (in practice a general), and a council made up of representatives of the cities. The League became strong enough to be used by the Romans against Philip V of Macedon in the late third century (see p. 389).

Another League, the Achaean, drew on traditions of cooperation in the northern Peloponnese that stretched back for centuries. Like the Aetolian League, the Achaean had a presiding general and cavalry commanders and an assembly that agreed a common foreign policy, even though, in practice, this lacked coherence. Originally anti-Macedonian, the League sought the protection of Macedonia when threatened by Sparta, but then switched allegiance to Rome in 200 when it became aware of where power really lay. The switch did little good. The League was crushed by Rome in 146 (see p. 391).

Athens maintained her independence for most of the period, but in the third century the city faced an economic crisis. The details are difficult to ascertain, but it is possible that rising grain prices and falling olive oil prices (due to new areas of production) caused a balance-of-trade deficit. Furthermore, her famous pottery, already degenerate in quality by the fourth century, was now being replaced by the more fashionable silverware. The release of vast quantities of precious metals by Alexander's campaigns drove down the price of silver, and Athens's silver mines may even have been closed temporarily in the third century. However, the city's fame as the traditional centre of moral philosophy (in contrast to that of Alexandria, which became the focus for mathematicians and scientists) remained. One of Aristotle's followers, Theophrastus, drew in 2,000 students to his lectures. Although one third-century visitor complained of the meanness of the city's streets, Athens benefited from the largesse of the surrounding monarchies. The Ptolemies introduced a sanctuary of the Egyptian gods Isis and Serapis, while Attalus II of Pergamum, a former student in the city, built a fine stoa, over 100 metres long, along the east of the Agora. (It has been reconstructed and now houses a museum of the Agora excavations.)

The Hellenistic Cults

One of the most interesting arenas of mutual accommodation between ruler and city was cult worship. Following the precedent set by Alexander (and even earlier than that by Lysander, p. 302), it soon became accepted that a monarch acquired an elevated status as the favoured of the gods. Not surprisingly, the monarchs were foremost

in stressing their divine links and would associate themselves with a particular deity. The Ptolemies chose Dionysus, the Attalids Athena, and the Macedonian kings Heracles, the assumed ancestor of Alexander. Kings became the focus of elaborate dynastic cults after their deaths. (See the essay by Angelos Chaniotis, 'The Divinity of Hellenistic Rulers', in Erskine (ed.), *A Companion to the Hellenistic World*.)

Cities would respond to this by creating their own cults to the ruler. The catalysts for these cults are not easy to pinpoint. There may have been an element of deliberate flattery, an insurance policy against the displeasure of the king, but, most important of all, the king could be targeted as the one individual who could actually get things done. The late Simon Price, a pioneering scholar of such developments, certainly saw this as the crucial element. When Athens approached Demetrius Poliorcetes, son of Antigonos the One-Eyed, who exercised temporary power over Athens in the late fourth century, the city knew where to look for protection. 'O son of the most mighty god Poseidon and of Aphrodite, hail. For other gods are either far away or have not ears, or do not exist nor heed us not at all; but thee we can see in very presence, not in word and not in stone, but in truth, and so we pray to thee.' (Translation: F. Walbank.) The rulers were never seen as gods in themselves but rather as worthy of receiving the honours that were traditionally due to the gods.

Cult worship of kings was carried out within the framework of traditional religion, often in a temple precinct with sacrifices and libations. In Egypt the Ptolemies were integrated within the traditional framework of divine rule. The Rosetta Stone, celebrated because its three texts, hieroglyphic, demotic, and Greek, allowed hieroglyphs to be deciphered (finally by the Frenchman Jean-François Champollion in the 1820s), is a record of thanksgiving of the priests of Memphis to Ptolemy V in 196 BC. In it Ptolemy was addressed as a god who was also the son of gods. This was a world where the divine was used as a medium through which relationships between humans and the gods and between humans and quasi-divine individuals, rulers or heroes, could be manipulated, often to the mutual advantage of both. It is impossible to re-create the emotional and spiritual contexts of these cults but the fact that they are to be found springing up across the Hellenistic world shows that they fulfilled important needs.

Greeks and Others

Outside mainland Greece and Macedonia, the Greek cities were set in a sea of native peoples, Persians, Indians, Egyptians, Jews, or Celts. It is difficult to disentangle the complex relationships that evolved as a result, but in many cases social distinctions between Greek and native remained rigid. In the city of Seleucia-on-the-Eulaeua (the former Persian capital of Susa), there is no record of any citizen (in the legal sense of the word) who was not Greek by birth. It takes three generations before the Seleucid rulers are found employing the first non-Greek in their administration, while it was said that Cleopatra VII, the last Ptolemaic ruler of Egypt, was the first in the dynasty to learn the local language. The formal title of

her capital Alexandria was Alexandria *by* Egypt, a telling illustration of its isolation from the native culture.

Despite the legal restrictions, the social boundaries between cultures were, inevitably, fluid. Greek values and customs were spread by a host of individuals and groups, traders, mercenaries, pilgrims to shrines and oracles, embassies from one city-state to another, who criss-crossed the Mediterranean and the east. Greek dialects that had remained distinct through the classical period now became absorbed in a common language, *koine*. Greek became the lingua franca of what was a highly mobile world (see further Chapter 29). Many non-Greeks would acquire a veneer of Greek culture to provide them with tools for survival. Native mercenaries had to pick up a smattering if they were to serve in the Hellenistic armies, and the experience stuck with them. When they retired they often adopted Greek styles for their tombs that they would embellish with Greek inscriptions as a sign of their rise within the cultural hierarchy.

Egypt provides the best-documented examples of the relationship between ruler and ruled. Once again the survival of papyrus in the dry climate is the reason. Greeks flocked to settlements along the Nile, from as many as 200 home cities according to the records. Usually Greeks guarded the privileges of citizenship for themselves and Alexandria itself was closed to Egyptian incomers other than those servicing the city. However, the Greeks always retained respect for the longevity and sophistication of Egyptian culture and in practice, in many areas outside Alexandria, Greek and Egyptian homes were not segregated and families intermarried. In Alexandria Egyptian styles of art merged with Greek, with the Ptolemies presented as traditional pharaohs. The further south one travelled, the less influence was exercised by Greeks. In Thebes the ancient and wealthy Egyptian families continued much as they had done before, maintaining their traditional legal system, for instance.

The Ptolemies had little option but to work closely with existing institutions. They needed revenue with which to maintain their capital city and to defend their kingdom against their Seleucid rivals and others. The traditional pharaonic administrative structure was still intact and so the surplus could be channelled upwards. The consequence, however, was a petty and intrusive bureaucracy that aroused deep resentment among the local peoples. By the beginning of the third century Upper Egypt had broken away and accepted 'pharaohs' from Nubia in place of the Ptolemies. In a desperate attempt to keep control, the Ptolemies were forced to bring Egyptians into the administration (usually only after they had received a Greek education) and make concessions to the temples, which had always been the most independent of the Egyptian institutions. The Ptolemies did not dare to challenge the priesthoods of Thebes but temples at Philae and Edfu were built under Ptolemaic patronage. The yawning cultural gaps could, however, hardly be bridged. By the time of Cleopatra VII the kingdom was already disintegrating, and it was hardly surprising that the scheming queen should look to powerful Roman commanders such as Caesar and Antony to bolster up her power (see Chapter 24). (For Hellenistic Egypt, see Roger Bagnall and Dominic Rathbone, *Egypt from Alexander to the Early Christians: An Archaeological and Historical*

Guide, Los Angeles, 2005, and Alan Bowman, *Egypt after the Pharaohs, 322 BC to AD 642*, Berkeley and London, 1986.)

Cultural Developments

The homogeneity of the Greek world was reinforced by its festivals and games. The traditional ones, at Olympia, the Isthmus, and Delphi, remained, but many new ones were founded by monarchs and cities eager to build up prestige and cash in on the trade they brought (a continuing tradition, as seen in the frenzied bidding by rival cities to host the modern Olympics). Their ambition was to make their games *isolympios*, equal in prestige to the Olympic Games. Some games were set up in honour of a dead king (the Ptolemeia in Alexandria, for instance, which honoured the memory of Ptolemy I), others to commemorate victories, such as the new games at Delphi established by the Aetolian League to celebrate the city's defeat of invading Celts in 279 BC. (The shock effect of an attack on the sacred oracle must have resonated as the repulse of the assault was long commemorated.) In a few instances non-Greeks are recorded as participating in these games and carrying off the crowns in chariot races or the athletic events. The Romans were known to compete at the Isthmian Games, and after 189 BC, when Roman influence became predominant in Greece, new festivals sprang up in honour of Rome.

Although traditional cults remained much as they had been, this was, spiritually, a restless age. In the place of the Olympian gods, aspirations focused on personifications such as Tyche, 'Chance' or 'Fortune', who was worshipped as a semi-divine entity. There was a growing interest in mystery religions, several of which were imported from outside the Greek world. The goddess Isis from Egypt, and Cybele, the great mother-goddess from Anatolia, were both adopted into the Greek (and later into the Roman) world and developed their own elaborate initiation cults. Of the traditional Greek gods, worship of Demeter through her mysteries at Eleusis (see p. 243) and of Dionysus proved the most resilient. Restless though this world may have been one can also be positive about the growing range of spiritual alternatives. So long as the gods were not openly mocked and public order maintained there was freedom to explore one's spirituality in a variety of ways. The most fascinating, if complex, relationships were those developed by eastern kingdoms, that of Asoka the Great (304–232), ruler of the vast Mauryan empire, and the Bactrians, independent from 255, who adapted Greek cults to their own purposes.

As in any mobile and vibrant world, the ambitious knew how to make good money. There is no evidence that the Mediterranean was any richer than it had been. In fact in many areas continuous warfare seems to have made it poorer while the mass of the population depended, as they had always done, on what they could grow for themselves, with no certainty of an agricultural surplus. However, it appears that what wealth there was, from landownership, trade, or a share in the influx of precious

metals that were released from the east by the conquests of Alexander, was concentrated into fewer hands. Trade probably expanded especially after 200 BC. Much of it was in smaller ships (50 tonnes is suggested by shipwreck evidence, though ships up to 165 tonnes were known) that exploited whatever markets there were as they passed along the coast. Before 225 BC there is very little evidence of any major expansion in the use of coins; after this there is good evidence of new mints and issues suggesting that demand for this medium of exchange was growing.

While the staples, grain, wine, and olive oil, always formed the bulk of goods, there was an increasing range of smaller manufactured goods packed into the empty corners of holds. The inhibitions on public display of wealth that had proved so influential in democratic Athens were relaxed, and the typical home of a cultured family would now boast wall paintings (landscapes were a favourite), mosaics in the reception rooms, and a host of smaller *objets d'art* in bronze or silver.

The appearance of more comfortable homes reflects a trend towards a more family-centred life. Women were given a higher profile, as can be seen from the wide array of ornaments, diadems, tiaras, earrings, and necklaces which survive. Marriage contracts, of which a few have been found, show that women now gained the right to divorce their husbands if they brought home other women or had children by them. The epigraphs on grave monuments speak freely of the loss felt when a wife dies, a suggestion of mutual affection, or at least the pretence of one. This would have been unheard of in fifth-century Athens. What Sarah Pomeroy in her *God-desses, Whores, Wives and Slaves* (New York, 1975) has described as 'a sophisticated etiquette of romance' was developing. Vase paintings now show love-making taking place in private (in contrast to the public nature of many sex scenes of the fifth century) and in comfort in bed. Women of the upper classes also enjoyed a higher status in public life. There are examples of women holding public office, and a wealthy woman from Priene donated a reservoir and aqueduct to the city. Women now seem able to deal in land and slaves, borrow money, and even enter horses in the Olympic Games. There is one early fourth-century example of a woman from Sparta being the winning owner in a chariot race at Olympia.

In the cities the richer citizens had lost many of their traditional roles as soldiers and statesmen. In response many became important benefactors of their cities, providing games or donating public buildings or statues, a tradition that lasted for some centuries with impressive results, as can be seen in surviving ruins. In Rhodes there was a long-standing tradition that, at times of famine, the richer classes would help the poor. The motives for these benefactions were varied and difficult to assess. There was undoubtedly an element of social aggrandizement involved in the public display of wealth, but the new rich may also have been defending their position against social upheavals (by the patronage of 'bread and circuses') or even profiting by hoarding grain and distributing it at times of famine. Occasionally there is even a mobilizing of the poor. In Sparta king Cleomenes III (ruled 235–219), faced with a declining citizen body and ambitious for expansion in the Peloponnese, freed a large number of helots and integrated them into a citizen army.

Arts in the Hellenistic Age

Much of the spirit of this complex age can be caught in its sculpture. The most favoured medium was bronze, tragically all too easily melted down and so often surviving only in later Roman marble copies. If the fifth century was one of calm idealism and proportion, there now evolved a more luxuriant and ornate style that sometimes bordered on the grotesque. The wonderful third- (possibly fourth-) century BC sculpture of a dancing satyr that dominated the first gallery of the 2012 London Royal Academy's exhibition *Bronze* provides a superb example of the period's exuberance. In architecture this was the age of the Corinthian column with its rich foliage (the earliest example found was in fact on the temple to Apollo at Bassae, built at the end of the fifth century), but there was a freedom for the patron to mix classical styles according to taste.

There is also a renewed interest in the personal. Figures are shown undertaking everyday tasks—a boy takes a thorn from his foot, a girl dressed in a *chiton* and mantle sits on a stool and gazes modestly at the ground. There is less inhibition in poses and often a preoccupation with movement. Another superb example of a figure in motion is the bronze jockey boy found in the sea off Cape Artemisium and now in the National Museum in Athens. Figures may sprawl rather than stand in perfect balance. A favourite is Hermaphrodite, whose sexual ambivalence, male genitals, female body, was created when a nymph fell in love with Hermaphroditus, the son of Hermes and Aphrodite, and asked the gods if she could be joined to his body. Alongside the Hermaphrodites comes the appearance of the female nude in sculpture. (Female nudes were already common on vases, and could be seen in paintings after the early fourth century.) The first known is the celebrated Aphrodite by Praxiteles discussed earlier (p. 3) and she reappears in a variety of poses, some coyly modest, others more openly erotic. (On art in this period see Lucilla Burn, *Hellenistic Art: From Alexander the Great to Augustus*, London, 2004; J. J. Pollitt, *Art in the Hellenistic Age*, Cambridge and New York, 1986; and R. R. R. Smith, *Hellenistic Sculpture: A Handbook*, London, 1991.)

A new interest in the individual, stimulated perhaps by the growth of wealthier lifestyles, is reflected in the emergence of portraiture. It originates in the coins of the period but then spreads to bronze and marble. Thousands of famous figures and local patrons, including kings, philosophers, dramatists, and athletes, were commemorated by statues in the market-places of the great cities. The monuments, which had traditionally lined the way into cities for centuries, now become more elaborate and widely spread. In some cities it seems as if there was a forest of statues cramming the public places.

The Hellenistic age was also an extraordinarily fertile and influential one for literature, although most of it has been lost. The great libraries of Alexandria and Pergamum dominate. Founded by the first two Ptolemies in the first half of the third century BC, Alexandria's collection may have run to a million texts. The librarians set out with the ambition of acquiring copies of every known work, even down

to cookery books. Bookstalls were scoured, ships docking at Alexandria were raided, and the official copies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides borrowed from Athens and then never returned. The library contributed more than any individual institution to preserving the literary works of Classical Greece in an age where Homer still enjoyed Shakespearian status among the educated. It was through the sponsorship of Ptolemy II, who wanted to have copies of even Hebrew texts in the library, that the scriptures were translated into Greek, the so-called Septuagint.

Alexandria's is the first known library to have its works shelved alphabetically (although this extended only to the first letter of each title.) The erudite Callimachus (c.310–c.240 BC) compiled a list of the books by authors grouped into the category in which they wrote, such as history, philosophy or lyric poetry. Distinct from the Library was the Museum (the word means a place of the Muses, where the cultivation of the arts and learning takes place). It was founded by the first of the Ptolemies, Ptolemy Soter, and became the haunt of scholars from throughout the Greek world. Those who failed to gain entry lampooned it as a centre of frivolous research and alcoholism. 'In the polyglot land of Egypt many now find pasturage as endowed scribblers, endlessly quarrelling in the Muses' birdcage', as one Timon of Phlius put it in the best tradition of ridiculing intellectuals as essentially ineffectual members of society; but overall Museum and Library played an essential role in keeping Greek culture alive and intact.

Alexandria's Library had a rival at Pergamum where the Attalid king Eumenes II (197–160) built up his own collection so ruthlessly that there are even reports that the works of Aristotle had to be hidden in a trench so that Eumenes could not get his hands on them. Eventually he is said to have accumulated 200,000 rolls of papyrus and this is borne out by excavations at Pergamum that have identified the original building. It is a moving experience to stand between its walls and distinguish the three rooms where the rolls were kept and the colonnade where readers would take out the rolls to consult them in the light. The competition from Pergamum infuriated the Ptolemies and they even banned the export of papyrus from Egypt. The response was a fruitful one. Papyrus survives well in the aridity of Egypt but soon rots in the damp. The Attalids were forced to use parchment (from animal skins, calves, sheep, or goats) for their texts. The production became so linked with Pergamum that the Latin *pergemena*, 'paper of Pergamum', provides the source for the word 'parchment' itself and parchment became for centuries the durable medium for all forms of manuscript. Yet, if the later Greek writer Plutarch is accurate, Alexandria won out in the end. Plutarch records that Mark Antony gave the complete library of Eumenes to his lover Cleopatra and transferred it to Alexandria.

The Library of Alexandria eventually disappeared. A number of distinct moments of destruction and burning are recorded between the first century BC and the Arab conquests of the seventh AD. The site of a series of lecture rooms may have been identified in recent excavations. The loss of Hellenistic literature, both from Alexandria and other regions such as southern Italy, has been devastating. Of the enormous number of histories believed to have been written, only one, that of Polybius, survives and even then only in parts. (It is described in Chapter 22.)

What does remain is mostly poetry, and vast sections of even this—tragedy, for instance—are missing.

The loss is the greater as the Roman poets learnt much from the Hellenistic poets. The Roman playwrights Plautus and Terence were heavily dependent on the comic playwright Menander (342–292 BC), whose plots they freely adapted. Some of Menander's work does survive, including at least one full play found only recently in a cache of papyrus in Egypt. Menander is seen as the master of the so-called New Comedy, which originated in Athens in the late fourth century and became popular throughout the Graeco-Roman world. It is middle-class comedy, centring on the affairs of the well-to-do who find themselves caught up in complicated plots and coincidences. Kidnapped children reveal themselves as long-lost heirs, while well-born girls raped and made pregnant under cover of darkness at festivals emerge to find the man they wish to marry is in fact the father of their child. There is little on politics, a great deal on marriage and money. The end is always happy with even the most obstinate of problems resolved. Molière, Sheridan, the Italian Carlo Goldoni, Oscar Wilde, and George Bernard Shaw are among those who appear to be in Menander's debt.

The poets of the period enjoyed a private world of intimacy based on friendship, nostalgia, and scholarship. Their poetry is self-consciously literary. Some of the mood has been captured in William Cory's famous, if not strictly accurate, translation of Callimachus' lament for his dead friend, Heracleitus:

They told me, Heracleitus, they told me you were dead,
They brought me bitter news to hear and bitter tears to shed.
I wept as I remembered how often you and I
Had tired the sun with talking and sent him down the sky.
And now that thou art lying, my dear old Carian guest,
A handful of grey ashes, long, long ago at rest,
Still are thy pleasant voices, thy nightingales awake;
For Death he taketh all away, but them he cannot take.

Callimachus was the most influential of the poets of the period, a particular favourite of the Romans, including Catullus and Ovid. He was a man of learning, responsible, as has been mentioned, for a 120-volume catalogue of the library at Alexandria and a supposed 800 volumes of other works. He set a tone for the age, one of striving after good taste and refined scholarship in an unashamedly elitist manner. 'I despise neo-epic sagas: I cannot welcome trends that drag the populace this way and that. Peripatetic sex-partners turn me off; I do not drink from the mains, can't stomach anything public.' (Translation: Peter Jay.) His waspish criticisms of modern soap operas would have been a joy to read. His Hymns, of which six survive, were elaborate compositions designed to be read among discerning friends, while his epigrams, such as the most famous to Heracleitus quoted above, deal with his more personal feelings, including his love for boys. It was his range, versatility, and lively intelligence that made him the archetypal poet of the age, and he is more quoted in this period than any other poet apart from Homer. His major works are now lost. They were copied and survived into the Middle Ages but are

then believed to have perished in the sack of the Imperial Library in Constantinople following the Fourth Crusade of 1204. (For poetry in general see G. O. Hutchinson, *Hellenistic Poetry*, Oxford and New York, 1988, and Richard Hunter, 'Literature and its Contexts', in Erskine (ed.), *A Companion to the Hellenistic World*.)

Relationships between these poets were often uneasy, and Callimachus was supposed to have had a spat with Apollonius Rhodius (c.295–215 BC), another *habitué* of the library at Alexandria, who had made his home in Rhodes. While Callimachus was the supreme exponent of the short and polished epigram, Apollonius revived the epic in the form of a long account of the adventures of the Argonauts. This difference in their approach to poetry probably fuelled their quarrel. Apollonius' *Argonautica* is chiefly remembered for its portrayal of the love of Medea for Jason, 'the Greeks' most brilliant portrayal of a girl falling passionately in love', in the words of Robin Lane Fox. It may have provided the inspiration for Virgil's affair between Dido and Aeneas in the *Aeneid*, and continued to be a favourite into medieval times.

As important for European literature was the emergence of pastoral poetry. Its father is usually seen to be Theocritus (first half of the third century). Theocritus was a native of Syracuse and probably lived in southern Italy before being attracted to Alexandria by Ptolemaic patronage. He may have drawn on the traditional songs of the shepherds of southern Italy to create a world in which shepherds banter with each other, woo playful girls, or lament the death of a companion against a backdrop of the changing seasons and fertile countryside. Love-making is at first joyful and freely enjoyed on the grass or among the cypress groves, though often disillusion follows. Theocritus describes the seduction of a girl by Daphnis, a legendary Sicilian herdsman who reappears in pastoral poetry through the ages, and goes on:

Thus did this happy pair their love dispense
With mutual joys, and gratified their sense;
The God of Love was there a bidden guest;
And present at his own mysterious feast.
His azure mantle underneath he spread,
And scattered roses on the nuptial bed;
While folded in each other's arms they lay,
He blew the flames and furnished out the play,
And from their foreheads wiped the balmy sweat away.
First rose the maid, and with a glowing face
Her downcast eyes beheld her print upon the grass;
Thence to her herd she sped herself in haste:
The bridegroom started from his trance at last,
And piping homeward jocundly he passed.

(Translation by the English poet John Dryden, 1685)

The happiness was not to last, and Daphnis was to die of love, leading to a lament by Theocritus which was to echo down the years and provide a model for such pastoral elegies as John Milton's *Lycidas*:

But O the heavy change, now thou art gone,
 Now thou art gone, and never must return!
 Thee, shepherd, thee the woods, and desert caves,
 With wild thyme and the gadding vine o'ergrown,
 And all their echoes mourn.

The attraction of the countryside as refuge is explored by another Syracusan poet, Moschus (c.350 BC). The translation is by the poet Shelley.

When winds that move not its calm surface sweep
 The azure sea, I love the land no more;
 The smiles of the serene and tranquil deep
 Tempt my unquiet mind. But when the roar
 Of Ocean's great abyss resounds, and foam
 Gathers upon the sea, and vast waves burst,
 I turn from the drear aspect to the home
 Of Earth and its deep woods, where, interspersed,
 When winds blow loud, pines make sweet melody.
 Whose house is some lone bark, whose toil the sea,
 Whose prey the wandering fish, an evil lot
 Has chosen. But I my languid limbs will fling
 Beneath the plane, where the brook's murmuring
 Moves the calm spirit, but disturbs it not.

Science and Mathematics

The Greeks had developed the intellectual characteristics that served to underpin fresh advances in mathematics and science. They were naturally curious and reluctant to believe that events unfolded only according to the will of the gods. So it was well accepted that the workings of the natural world could be understood. The importance of reason, how arguments work or fail to work, and what can be done with logic to advance from premisses to new conclusions, was widely acknowledged. Educated Greeks were willing to gather evidence and speculate on it. Perhaps most crucial of all, authority was not accepted for authority's sake; any argument could be challenged through the use of reason or the gathering of fresh empirical evidence.

Such intellectual engagement was, of course, the activity only of an elite and any idea that this elite achieved scientific objectivity independently of the wider political, religious, and social contexts of their age is illusory. There was no separate discipline called 'science' with professionals working within it to the exclusion of other intellectual concerns. Even so the breadth of the achievement and the ingenuity with which difficulties were confronted was remarkable. These were some of the greatest minds in history tackling scientific problems, some of which remain impenetrable today. A list of subject areas with origins in the Greek language makes the point: optics, acoustics, mechanics, chemistry, geography, geology, astronomy,

biology, medicine, and psychology. (See the relevant chapters in Jacques Brunschwig and Geoffrey Lloyd (eds.), *Greek Thought: A Guide to Classical Knowledge*, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 2000; chapters 1 to 6 of David Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science*, 2nd edition, Chicago and London, 2007; and Stephen Bertman, *The Genesis of Science*, New York, 2010.)

In the sciences and mathematics the centre of activity was the very urban and cosmopolitan setting of Alexandria. The Ptolemies actively encouraged scientific research. The three great mathematicians of the day, Euclid (active about 300 BC), Archimedes (287–212 BC), and Apollonius of Perge (active about 200 BC), the last two ‘original geniuses of the highest order’, in the words of Geoffrey Lloyd, were all based in Alexandria. In his *Elements*, Euclid produced what has possibly been the most successful textbook in history. His method was to set out a series of axioms, propositions so basic that everyone must accept them, and then through rational argument systematically deduce theorems from them. The simplicity of his work and the method he used has made *The Elements* the foundation of all subsequent mathematics. Archimedes built further on Euclid’s work. He devised sophisticated ways of measuring the area of a circle and was the first man to calculate accurately the size of pi and devise the formula for measuring the volume of a sphere. He virtually invented the science of hydrostatics. Overall it could be argued that Archimedes made more advances in mathematics than any other mathematician in history. (Galileo, one of his greatest admirers, described him as ‘superhuman.’) Apollonius’ contribution was in geometry, where his work with conic sections taxes even the most advanced mathematician today.

In general these early mathematicians had to contend with limited technology but the unravelling of the Antikythera mechanism, an astonishing calculator found in a shipwreck off the island of Antikythera as long ago as 1900 but whose complexity has only recently been appreciated, shows that sophisticated mechanisms for plotting the stars were available. The mechanism dates from the early first century BC with accompanying textual information in Greek (although it appears to have been programmed from Babylonian records). It is unique as a survival but the intricacy and precision of its many, well over thirty, gears show that there must have been prototypes, now all lost. There are scattered references in the literature to similar devices. A major continuing research project on the mechanism is discovering even more functions.

The Antikythera mechanism confirms that astronomy was the most fruitful area of scientific speculation. Discoveries went far ahead of the conventional wisdom of the time. Aristarchus of Samos (c.275 BC), for instance, suggested that the earth went round the sun, although he failed to convince the mainstream astronomers, who continued for another 1,700 years to believe in the earth-centred universe. In the third century Eratosthenes calculated the circumference of the earth by comparing the shadow, or lack of it, thrown by the sun at two different points on the Nile at midday. Although his final result is disputed, he may have come within 300 kilometres of the correct figure. (The Greeks had no problems in accepting the world as round.)

The most influential figure in astronomy was the mathematician Apollonius (beginning of the second century BC). He started with the premiss that the earth is at rest in the centre of the universe. To the Greek astronomers this seemed the best explanation of the constancy of the relationship between distant stars, and also accorded with Aristotle's theory that, as the evidence of gravity suggested, everything was attracted to the earth as the natural centre of the universe. From this premiss Apollonius evolved a system with which to explain the movements of the planets. He assumed that they always moved in circles but that the centre of each circle itself moved along the circumference of a second circle. Sometimes the centre of this second circle was the earth but other points were possible. The system allowed a wide range of astronomical phenomena, including the varying length of the seasons, to be explained more easily. It was Apollonius' system, as elaborated by Hipparchus of Nicaea, that was to be used in the second century AD by the greatest astronomer of all, Ptolemy (active in Alexandria AD 127–45, see below, p. 550). Hipparchus (end of second century BC) achieved the remarkable feat of spotting and defining the precession of the equinoxes. As the earth is not an exact sphere its axes oscillate slightly and this means that its position as a viewing platform for the stars shifts slightly but consistently, achieving a full revolution in 26,000 years. Hipparchus spotted this and made the first calculation of the speed of change.

Greek medicine, in contrast, claimed to give first place to observation. The earliest surviving body of texts on Greek medicine, some sixty in all, dating from between 430 and 330 BC, were traditionally attributed to Hippocrates, a physician who lived on the island of Kos in the fifth century. Even though there is no evidence that he actually wrote any of the texts, and many show the terminology of a later period, that of the superb Hellenistic Aesclepium whose ruins survive in Kos to this day, Hippocrates continues to be associated with many of the maxims outlined in them: that the patient needs to be viewed as a whole, that much healing takes place naturally, that a simple diet is conducive to good health, and that the first duty of a doctor is to his patients rather than to himself or to the accumulation of wealth. (For a full survey see Vivian Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, London and New York, 2004.)

One of the most influential texts attributed to Hippocrates is entitled *On the Sacred Disease*. It deals with epilepsy, the disorder that was traditionally most easily associated with a direct intervention by the gods. The text points out that epilepsy occurs naturally, is rooted in the brain, has defined causes, possibly inherited, and might be cured by drugs if treated early. The text challenges those who peddle 'magic' cures for such illnesses; only the trained doctor can help. Here is the birth of modern scientific medicine.

Any serious advance in the field depended on the gathering of empirical information about the working of the human body. The Greeks were used to cutting up animals after sacrificing and to some extent they applied what they learnt of anatomy by analogy to the human body. There is a report that Herophilus of Chalcedon and Erasistratus of Ceos, both active in the 260s, went one step further in taking living criminals as the subjects of their observations and gained the first significant insights into the working of the human body. Their methods included dissection of

their subjects, possibly even when they were still alive. Between them Herophilus and Erasistratus were the first to investigate the nervous system and understand the difference between sensory and motor nerves, and they came close to discovering the circulation of the blood. It was Herophilus who described and named the duodenum for the first time. Inevitably they were limited, as were all Greek scientists, by their lack of instruments. They worked only with the naked eye and had no chance of seeing bacteria or viruses. Their conception of the causes of illness was circumscribed by the theory of the four humours. Nevertheless, their work provided the foundations on which Galen, the greatest of the Greek doctors, built his pioneering studies of physiology in the second century AD (see below, p. 551).

Underlying the achievements of these 'scientists' was an obsessive curiosity, and it can be seen in the Hellenistic period in a passion for exploration. Alexander had created a surge of interest in geography after so many apparently exotic lands and cultures had been revealed in the east and the 'scientists' he took with him reported back their experiences. In the next three centuries Greek travellers explored the furthest reaches of the accessible world. One of the most remarkable voyages was that of Pytheas, a sea captain from Massilia (modern Marseilles), who sailed through the Straits of Gibraltar and then northwards to make a circumnavigation of Britain in about 320. He reached a point where the nights were only two to three hours long, a latitude of about 65 degrees. Pytheas was a genuine adventurer, a mathematician and astronomer who seems to have had no commercial interests and simply an urge to understand how the world worked. Other travellers reached the river Ganges in India and, in Africa, as far south as Somaliland, where elephants were found and brought back for the armies of the Ptolemies. One fruit of these travels was the first world map, produced by Dicaearchus of Messenia about 300. It incorporated a line of latitude. At the end of the century Eratosthenes introduced a map that showed longitude as well.

The Philosophers

Philosophy was not a defined activity as such, but impassioned discussion of what it meant to live a 'good life' was intrinsic to intellectual life. Athens retained the cultural lure it had enjoyed in previous centuries and Plato's Academic and Aristotle's Lyceum continued in business. New ideas grabbed the imagination of those who loved argument. Individuals set off down new pathways of debate, schools were formed by inspiring teachers, and students would wander from one to another in search of enlightenment. (For a clear overview see A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, 2nd edition, London, 1986. On Stoicism, both Tad Brennan, *The Stoic Life: Emotions, Duties and Fate*, Oxford and New York, 2005, and William Irvine, *A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy*, New York and Oxford, 2008, both aim to find the relevance of ancient Stoicism for today.)

The two major figures of Hellenistic philosophy, Epicurus and Zeno, came from Samos and Cyprus respectively but it was to Athens that they were drawn to teach.

Both tried to find a meaning for the individual in an age of angst. For Epicurus, who lived in Athens from 307 until his death in 271, the world was one in which the gods had little or no influence. He followed the materialist philosopher Democritus (see p. 198) in believing that the world was composed of atoms and that those making up each individual dissolved when that individual died and then regrouped to make up other objects. All that could be known must be based on observation and experience of this world. The only purpose of this life is to ensure survival in this world through pleasure.

By this Epicurus did not mean a frenzied search for sensual enjoyment but rather peace of mind and freedom from pain. 'There is no use in philosophy if it does not expel the suffering of the soul,' as Epicurus put it. In order to achieve this it was important to escape from any fear of death and to concentrate on the pleasures of everyday living, chief amongst which Epicurus numbered friendship and rational thought. 'The pleasant life is produced not by a string of drinking bouts and revelries, nor by the enjoyment of boys and women, nor by fish and the other items on an expensive menu, but by sober reasoning.' A retreat from the hectic, competitive life of the Greek world marked a major reversal of traditional Greek values where a man was judged by the success of his public life, and Epicureanism was never completely respectable. However, it proved popular in the last years of republican Rome and has not lost its impact today. A recent Italian edition of Epicurus sold a million copies.

The founder of the Stoics, Zeno (c.333–262 BC), taught from the colonnades of the Stoa Poikile along the northern side of the Agora of Athens. However, his ideas are best represented, and developed, in the works of his follower Chrysippus (c.279–206 BC) who became leader of the Stoic school in about 230. Intellectually restless and endlessly fertile, Chrysippus probed every aspect of Stoic philosophy—one later admirer claimed to have a library of 700 of his texts. He recognized the deeper philosophical problems Stoicism presented, the nature of the relationship between all material objects, the driving force of events (*logos*, the force of reason, God, in effect), the place of fate, the extent to which free will exists.

Like the Epicureans, the Stoics accepted that the world was made entirely of matter and knowledge of it could be gained through direct observation and reason. Unlike the Epicureans, however, for whom the world was continually changing as atoms rearranged themselves into new forms, the Stoics saw the world as a single enduring entity, a cosmos that moved forward in time under its own purpose, an evolution towards a state of ultimate goodness. Human beings were an intrinsic part of the unfolding cosmos, not separate from it. It was important to come to terms with the fact that one was part of a greater whole and also had a personal responsibility for making a contribution towards the unfolding of the future. On the one hand the Stoic learnt to accept pain and pleasure with indifference, as nothing could be done to avoid them; on the other there was a duty to live a virtuous life in accordance with one's true nature as a human being. The mature Stoic was thoughtful about his own role in society and often felt duty bound to take on public responsibilities. Stoicism was to be particularly influential in Rome, and was one of the Greek philosophical traditions that fed into early Christianity.

The Cyrenian philosopher Carneades (214–129 BC) was another newcomer to Athens, and eventually became head of Plato's Academy. He became obsessed with the problems of finding secure knowledge and so is counted among the Sceptics, a school founded by Pyrrho of Elis (c.360–c.270). Pyrrho had travelled east with Alexander and absorbed eastern philosophy. The Sceptics saw the difficulties in saying anything of certainty about the natural world. Reasoning could be faulty and the senses misleading. Carneades paid a famous visit to Rome in 155 BC as part of an embassy pleading for relief from a fine the Romans had imposed on Athens. He infuriated his listeners by arguing for the concept of justice one day and then refuting his own arguments the next. This was, of course, the weakness of Scepticism. While it sharpened intellectual debate, the end result was to leave the philosopher inert and devoid of any beliefs. In practice the Sceptics accepted that they had to live by convention but they left an important legacy which was revived in the sixteenth century with the rise of new approaches to scientific thought.

The Jews in the Hellenistic Period

Stoicism accepted that there was one guiding force, the *logos*, or divine reason, which shaped the destiny of the world. As has been seen in Chapter 6, a much more anthropomorphic single god had been adopted by the Jews. Under the Persians the Jews had been tolerated, and references in the Bible to the Persians are favourable. However, for the first 120 years after Alexander's death Palestine was under Ptolemaic rule and was subject to the same intrusive bureaucracy suffered by the Egyptians. One result was a new diaspora, a scattering of Jews throughout the Mediterranean world. The largest Jewish community outside Palestine was in Alexandria but there were also communities in Asia (the Seleucids were tolerant) and as far north as the Black Sea. Inevitably the scattering led to the loosening of roots with traditional Judaism. Many Jews of the diaspora became Hellenized and even forgot Hebrew. The Torah (the instruction or law of Judaism) and the Hebrew Bible were translated into Greek (the Septuagint). Even in Judaea, the mountainous region around Jerusalem, a Greek education became popular and gymnasia threatened the traditional Jewish schools.

However, wherever they settled and however Hellenized they became, Jewish communities seem to have continued to live together and their faith survived. This was the world where 200 years later Paul, not only a Hellenized Jew but also a Roman citizen, was to be born, in Tarsus in Cilicia. The most prominent Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria (c.20 BC to AD 50), was a contemporary of Paul's although the two had little in common intellectually. Philo integrated Judaism with Greek philosophy but may also have been an influence on early Christian thought—in the idea that begins John's Gospel, that Christ was the *logos*, 'the Word', for instance. (See Kenneth Schenck, *A Brief Guide to Philo*, Louisville, 2005.)

In Judaea itself the Ptolemies were replaced as rulers by the Seleucids in 200. While the Ptolemies had never pursued Hellenization as a policy (it had happened

naturally as a result of the steady contact between administrators and administrated), the Seleucids were much more intrusive and set about imposing Greek culture. They found the richer Jews receptive, but king Antiochus IV (ruled 175–163 BC) went too far. He had been humiliated by the Romans in 168 when he had tried to invade Egypt (see later, p. 390) and he was desperate to try to rebuild his dwindling kingdom around a unified Greek heritage. He was also short of money and soon had his eyes on the treasury of the great Temple at Jerusalem. He had no understanding of the continuing depth and tenacity of the Jewish monotheistic tradition, and when he tried to ban Jewish observances and dedicate the Temple at Jerusalem to Zeus (in 167), guerrilla warfare broke out under the leadership of Judas Maccabaeus. By 141 the Seleucids were forced to accept the independence of Judaea under Judas's brother Simon. The kingdom was extraordinarily successful, expanding to both the south and to the north as far as Galilee. The result was the confirmation and preservation of orthodox Jewish nationalism against the forces of Hellenism. This was the society into which Jesus was to be born, and from which Christianity was to spread into the Hellenistic Jewish world of Paul. (A good introduction is Erich Gruen's 'Jews and Greeks', in Erskine (ed.), *A Companion to the Hellenistic World*.)

Conclusion

Despite occasional revivals, such as that inspired by the Seleucid king Antiochus III, the Hellenistic kingdoms had begun to lose their vigour by the end of the third century. The decline of the Seleucids and the Ptolemies has already been charted. The Greek world might simply have disintegrated into a number of smaller states if a more united and determined power had not arisen in the west. The Greeks had heard of the city of Rome as early as the fifth century, but it was not until 280, when Pyrrhus of Epirus took a Hellenistic army over to Italy to protect the city of Tarentum against Roman expansion, that the real strength of the city was first appreciated. By 241 all the Greek cities of Sicily except Syracuse were under Roman control. Rome as yet showed no interest in Greece, but from 229 pirates originating from the rugged Illyrian coast were causing her increasing concern. They had been suppressed by 219, and by then Rome had established a protectorate over the Illyrian coast. This intrusion aroused the suspicion of Philip V of Macedon, and the stage was set for a confrontation that was to change the history not only of the ancient Mediterranean but of the world.

INTERLUDE 5

Celts and Parthians

The small town of Hallstatt lies at the edge of a lake in a fine mountain setting in present-day Austria. Here in the mid-nineteenth century a huge prehistoric cemetery was unearthed. The earliest graves date from about 1100 BC but from about 700 BC there was a significant change in burial customs. The later graves were those of aristocratic warriors, each buried in a wooden chamber under a four-wheeled wagon complete with yokes and harness. Richly decorated buckles, rings, and amulets lay alongside the bodies, and pottery and amber suggested trading links with both northern and southern Europe. There was also the widespread presence of iron.

This was the first archaeological evidence for the peoples known to the Greeks as *keltoi* and to the Romans as Gauls, the Celts. Yet were these a distinct people or were the words *keltoi* or Gaul used as a general term to describe all the cultures to be found beyond the limits of Greek or Roman culture? It is astonishing to find that there is no recorded case of anyone calling themselves Celtic in the British Isles before the eighteenth century but now a Celtic identity is assumed for anyone with Welsh, Scottish, or Irish ancestry and a sense of Celtic culture, specially potent in music, is widespread. So where are the origins of this identity? Can one trace any archaeological and literary evidence for a distinct and coherent Celtic people, 'the first Europeans' as some have seen them?

In the first millennium BC central and western Europe was occupied by a variety of tribal groups under the leadership of warrior elites, and, as already mentioned, one of these can be defined as a distinct culture, the Hallstatt. The so-called Hallstatt period lasted from 750 to 450 BC. Hallstatt peoples spread westwards through what is now central France and northern Spain, and by 500 BC some groups had even crossed into southern Britain. The culture is characterized by graves crowded with gold ornaments, brooches, jewellery, and drinking horns. Typically, Hallstatt settlements would be found along river valleys, those of the Seine, Rhine, and Danube, for instance, which provided access to the sea. Soon links were being forged with the Mediterranean, primarily the Etruscans and the Greeks. A particularly lucrative trade route was up the Rhône from the Greek colony of Massilia. The Hallstatt elites could provide gold, tin, hides, and, perhaps, slaves. In return they imported Greek pottery, wine (for which they had such demand that one source records that they would exchange a slave for a single amphora), and, in a few cases, prestige goods such as the celebrated Vix crater, possibly a diplomatic gift (see p. 154). It was the peoples of the land around Massilia that classical writers record as calling themselves Celts.

As the importance of local Hallstatt chieftains grew, they established themselves in defended hilltop fortresses, such as Mont Lassois in Burgundy and the Heuneberg in southern Germany, which was defended by mudbrick walls with bastions, an extraordinary creation for northern Europe and one which must have been inspired by Mediterranean examples. Their artwork was becoming more sophisticated, drawing on motifs already known in the Bronze Age but also incorporating patterns and symbols from Greece and Asia.

In the middle of the fifth century the dominance of the Hallstatt elites was being undermined. It appears that less sophisticated tribal groups on the rivers Marne and Moselle on the northern edge of the Hallstatt culture were establishing contact with the Etruscans, who, having found their routes to the west blocked by Greeks, were now trading overland to the north. One lure was the high-quality iron ore of the Hunsrück-Eifel region. The native groups now began to realize that they controlled important resources or trade routes along which tin, amber, gold, salt, or iron travelled. The impact on these tribes of their good fortune appears to have been dramatic. They accumulated fine goods for themselves and, in particular, learnt the arts of metalworking. The resulting culture is known as La Tène, after a lakeside settlement of that name in Switzerland. La Tène art is distinctive but largely confined to decorative objects in metal and jewellery. Sacred symbols, such as the human head or venerated birds and animals, are woven into complex abstract patterns used to grace weapons or personal ornaments. Attempts have been made to trace influences from the Greeks, Scythians, and even the Persians on La Tène art, but it remains individual and instantly recognizable, its motifs still popular today.

Whether the La Tène elites actually wiped out the Hallstatt elites or whether their economy simply collapsed after La Tène groups closed off the supply of prestige goods is not clear, but from 450 BC La Tène was dominant and expansionist. Its graves are characterized by speedy two-wheeled chariots, apparently adopted from the Etruscans. Pressures for expansion may have come from German tribes from the north, but the evidence from cemeteries (and the ancient classical sources) suggests rapid population increase as well. Many of the migrations were simply raids of young male warriors, their status accruing from the numbers they could recruit for their war-bands and the plunder they could seize. In some cases raids were followed by settlement—across the Alps in northern Italy, for instance (where earlier Hallstatt migrants were joined by La Tène groups) from the early fifth century—or in central Anatolia where the Galatians arrived in the third century after migrations across Macedonia and Greece. The settlements were small scale, supported by intensive agriculture, and from them war-bands ranged southwards, either as raiders or mercenaries, as far as Rome and even Sicily. In Anatolia the Attalid kings of Pergamum based their prestige on the successful defeat of the Galatians (see earlier, p. 333).

This then is the background to many of the classical descriptions of the ‘Celts’. The word, first used of one local people around Massilia, was now used generally for these European ‘barbarians’. What gives the term some coherence is that there is evidence that these people shared a *lingua franca*. The evidence comes from place names, personal names, and inscriptions and suggests that there were at least three

related dialects in Europe in Spain (Celtiberian), Gaul (Gaulish), and northern Italy (Lepontic). None is spoken today. They have been given the name Continental Celtic, but this is a later (eighteenth-century) imposition and is one of the ways in which a Celtic identity has been created by later generations. It would be extending the evidence to suggest that language was linked to any ethnic group, or, as later commentators have called it, a 'Celtic brotherhood'.

The context in which the 'Celts' were encountered by Greeks, Romans, and Etruscans was as formidable warriors, relying heavily on surprise and ambushes and, when in direct confrontation, on martial display. The Greek historian Polybius gives an account of 'Celtic' tribes in battle at Telemon, which turned out to be a decisive Roman victory, in 225 BC:

The Insubres and Boii wore their trousers and light cloaks but the Gaesetae had discarded their garments owing to their proud confidence in themselves and stood naked with nothing but their arms, in front of the whole array. The Romans were terrified by the fine order of the Celtic host and the dreadful din, for there were innumerable horn blowers and trumpeters and, as the whole army was shouting their war cries at the same time, there was such a tumult of sound that it seemed that not only the trumpeters and soldiers but all the country around had got a voice and caught up the cry. Very terrifying too, were the appearance and gestures of the naked warriors in front, all in the prime of life and firmly built men, and all the leading companies adorned with gold torques and armlets.

Strabo, writing in the first century BC, describes their exuberance as if they were children.

To the frankness and high-spiritedness of their temperament must be added the traits of childish boastfulness and love of decoration. They wear ornaments of gold, torques on their necks and bracelets on their arms and wrists, while people of high rank wear dyed garments besprinkled with gold. It is this vanity which makes them unbearable in victory and so completely downcast in defeat.

So far nothing has been said of the 'Celtic' British Isles. Caesar, writing in the first century BC, assumed that peoples from Gaul had migrated to the south coast of Britain but the archaeological record is open to much dispute. In some cases there is linguistic evidence of migration. The Parisii of northern England seem related to the Parisi of the Seine valley in northern France. (There is also some similarity between the two tribes' grave goods.) On the whole, however, the scholarly trend has been to replace traditional diffusionist explanations of migrations with the possibility that intensive contact through trade led to many native peoples in Britain adopting La Tène culture to maintain the status of their own elites. However they acquired the language, most Britons spoke a dialect of Celtic known as Insular Celtic. Again it is a term used first in the eighteenth century but it does have the advantage of referring to languages that are still being spoken. It is normally divided into Q-Celtic and P-Celtic on the basis of whether an original 'k' sound develops into 'qu' or 'p' with time. P-Celtic appears to have been spoken in most of Britain and now survives in the Welsh (and, on the Continent, the Breton) language, while Q-Celtic remains in the native Gaelic languages of Ireland, the Isle of Man, and western Scotland. It is this language (and the legends and myths expressed in it)

that underlies much of the existing sense of a Celtic brotherhood. It has been argued, for instance (though not without contention), that the Irish saga *Tain Bo Cuailnge* has elements that could go back to the late first millennium BC.

The Celts could never sustain themselves by war, especially after the Hellenistic monarchs and Rome became able to offer effective resistance, so agriculture remained at the core of each tribal economy. By the second century BC, however, there was a further development as some communities became concentrated in larger urban settlements, the so-called *oppida*. There is some evidence that these centres grew to protect trade routes at a time of growing external pressures, but their appearance is also suggestive of growing prosperity and stability. Coinage, adopted from Greek and Macedonian examples, appears. The *oppida* were primarily trading settlements but also, in many cases, supported local industries or were close to important natural resources. Most prominent of all was the great settlement at Manching on the upper Danube. It was set on an open plain and covered 375 hectares. It exploited local deposits of iron, but copper and bronze were also worked and high-quality pottery manufactured.

As the Romans became stronger, they were able to take the offensive against the Celts. The tribes of Gaul were defeated and their warrior elites finally broken, although some re-emerged as auxiliary troops serving in the Roman army. In the famous words of Tacitus, the Gauls were seduced by the trappings of civilization (see p. 511). Their many gods were merged into the Roman pantheon, and within two generations prominent Celtic families had adopted Roman names. What may have survived of a Celtic heritage in outlying areas of Europe was there to be revived by nationalists from the eighteenth century onwards.

Making any kind of coherent links between the Hallstatt and La Tène cultures, a Celtic language with both continental and British dialects, and a mass of other peoples, some of whom may have been migratory Celts, others non-Celts who adopted elements of La Tène culture, is impossible. The term ‘Celt’ is generally, if loosely, used here to describe the peoples of western and central Europe as encountered by the Greeks and Romans and conquered by the latter. The Celts are also to be distinguished from the Germanic tribes beyond the Rhine and Danube although here again any clear distinction between Celt and German is difficult to make. (See, as useful introductions to the issues discussed here, Barry Cunliffe, *The Celts: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford and New York, 2003, and Simon James, *The World of the Celts*, London and New York, 2005.)

The Parthians

The story of the Seleucid empire, and the continuous pressures it faced, is told in Chapter 20. Its disintegration in the west at the hands of the Romans is told in Chapter 21. In the east its most formidable opponents were the Parthians. After the absorption of western Asia into the Roman empire, the Parthians were to prove one of the most persistent enemies of Rome. Their empire lasted some 400 years.

It was at the end of the third century BC that a tribal leader, Arsaces, fought his way to dominance over the many nomadic peoples of Parthia, a remote northern province of the Seleucid empire. His strength lay in his horsemen, who fought either as heavily armed cavalrymen or as archers. He proved impossible for the Seleucids to defeat, and although his kingdom remained part of the Seleucid empire, Arsaces exultantly transformed himself into an independent monarch with a fine new capital built at Hecatompylos.

It took another hard century of fighting before the Parthian empire was fully established. It had to achieve defensible frontiers in both the east and the west. Mithridates I (171–138 BC) was the first Parthian ruler to achieve independence from the Seleucids. He penetrated as far south as Mesopotamia, but had to surrender his conquests when threatened from the east. He initiated a policy of tolerance towards the Greek culture that by now had suffused Persia. (On his coins he portrayed his ancestor Arsaces as Apollo.) A successor, Mithridates II (ruled 123–88 BC, not to be confused with Mithridates VI of Pontus, see page 408), won back the Parthian homeland, pushed the western boundaries of the empire as far as the Euphrates, and subdued the nomadic peoples of the east.

This was the true foundation of the Parthian empire. Mithridates was a gifted ruler who was quick to exploit the position of his empire as a middleman between his two most powerful enemies, China in the east, and, after the demise of the Seleucids, Rome in the west. The Chinese, under the Han dynasty, were happy to respond. They traded silk in return for the majestic horses provided by the Parthians, which they needed for their own defence. (The Chinese were the only people who knew the secret of the moment when to destroy the larvae of the silkworm so that the filament would form a continuous length that could be woven into thread. It was a secret only smuggled into the west in the sixth century AD.) Ambassadors were exchanged. The Parthians sent ostrich eggs and conjurors as their gift to the Chinese court, and in 106 BC the first caravan travelled west from China.

The Romans developed an insatiable desire for silk, and the Parthians were able to charge heavy dues on traffic along the overland trade route, the famous Silk Road. The first official meeting between Romans and Parthians took place on the Euphrates in 92 BC. The Romans were represented by Sulla, later the dictator of Rome. He misjudged the Parthians, assuming that their ambassadors had come to submit themselves as vassals. He treated them with such contempt that the Parthian ambassador was later beheaded for acquiescing in this humiliation. The Roman general Pompey made the same mistake referring to the Parthian monarch only as 'king' instead of the traditional 'king of kings'. At the Battle of Carrhae, 53 BC, the Parthians were to have their revenge, and they followed this up with another defeat, of Mark Antony, in 34 BC (see Chapter 24). The end of the first century BC saw the zenith of the empire, and the emperor Augustus was wise enough to recognize it as an equal to Rome, resting content with the return of the Roman standards captured at Carrhae. Conflict with the Parthians was, however, to continue over the centuries, until the collapse of the Parthian empire in the 200s AD.

Not without reason did gods and men choose this spot for the site of our city—the salubrious hills, the river to bring us produce from the inland regions, and seaborne commerce from abroad, the sea itself, near enough for convenience yet not so near as to bring danger from foreign fleets, our situation in the very heart of Italy—all these advantages make it of all places in the world the best for a city destined to grow great.

(Livy, *History of Rome*, Book V, translation: Tim Cornell)

The Roman historian Livy (59 BC–AD 17) began writing his history of Rome in 29 BC, just at the moment when it seemed that all that had been achieved might be lost in the chaos of civil war and national degeneracy. He was looking back at nobler times when there had seemed little doubt that this was a city ‘destined to grow great’. Yet, whatever its advantages, the city’s rise to power had been slow. The hills of Rome had been settled for at least 700 years before the city expanded from a relatively small territory on the plain of Latium and achieved the domination of the Italian peninsula in the fourth and third centuries BC.

The Geography of Italy

The achievement, when it eventually came, was, however, a remarkable one. The most formidable obstacle to successful domination has been a mountain range, the Apennines. The Apennines stretch down the peninsula for 1,000 kilometres rising to nearly 3,000 metres in places and are often between 50 and 100 kilometres wide. There are pockets of fertile land high in the Apennines so a reasonably sized population can be supported, but the range breaks up and isolates communities. Italy, as a result, has always been a country of unexpected diversity, strong regional loyalties, and well-established local languages. Even in the twentieth century Italian remained a second language for many ‘Italians’.

Around the Apennines lie the coastal plains. The richest is the Po valley in northern Italy that makes up 70 per cent of the lowland of Italy. Further north the Alps appear to close the peninsula off from Europe. In fact they are not as impassable as they look. The extraordinary find of ‘The Ice Man’, a body dating from 3300 BC, high in the Alps in 1991 shows that individuals were crossing by foot in the earliest times, and ‘Celtic’ tribes, driven by overpopulation or tribal rivalry, successfully migrated

across the Alps in the sixth and fifth centuries BC and settled in the Po valley. It was these resilient peoples (Gauls to the Romans) rather than the Alps that were to provide the main barrier to Roman expansion in the north.

The Romans had other people to subdue before they could achieve their 'destiny'. The most fertile land along the Apennines is that along the west coast. The soil is volcanic and the rainfall good, while between the rivers Tiber and Arno are to be found some of the richest mineral deposits in the central Mediterranean. The coast is indented and so provides a safe haven for seafarers. From the eighth century, easterners, Greeks and Phoenicians in particular, were trading inland for minerals. Their suppliers were the native peoples of Etruria, the Etruscans, who grew rich on the pickings of the trade.

The Etruscans

There have always been those who have been drawn to the Etruscans, often presenting them as a particularly mysterious people. The novelist D. H. Lawrence, for example, already tubercular and on a slow path to death, became totally immersed in the atmosphere of an Etruscan world entirely of his own making. As he wandered among deserted Etruscan tombs in the mid-1920s he fantasized:

The things they did in their easy centuries are as natural and as easy as breathing. They leave the breast breathing freely and pleasantly with a certain fullness of life. Even the tombs. And that is the true Etruscan quality: ease, naturalness and an abundance of life, no need to force the mind or soul in any direction. And death to the Etruscan was a pleasant continuance of life, with jewels and wines and flutes playing for the dance. (From *Etruscan Places*, published posthumously in 1932)

There is, in fact, no evidence to support Lawrence's belief that the Etruscans were a people without cares. Why then have they acquired this image? There is always something attractive about a civilization that has vanished. Many Etruscan cities are now deserted and so they are particularly atmospheric places to visit. The poet Propertius (first century BC) wrote of the desolation of the Etruscan city of Veii, captured by the Romans in 396 BC.

Veii, thou hadst a royal crown of old,
And in thy forum stood a throne of gold!
Thy walls now echo but the shepherd's horn,
And o'er thine ashes waves the summer corn.

(Translation by George Dennis)

(Dennis remains perhaps the greatest of the nineteenth-century writers on the Etruscans, and still worth consulting while on the road.)

The language of the Etruscans (which, unlike other languages of the peninsula, Oscan, Umbrian, and Latin, is non-Indo-European in origin) is often said to be incomprehensible and this has added mystery. However, progress has been made. 'Etruscan' is written in an alphabet derived from that of the Euboean Greeks and

much has been deciphered, although not every word recorded in it is yet understood and what appears to have been a solid body of literature recounting the deeds of leading families has been lost. To add the mystery, Herodotus passed on the legend that the Etruscans had an exotic origin in the east. There may be some truth in this. While a strong argument has been made, from the archaeological evidence, that Etruscan civilization originated within Italy itself and can be traced as a continuum from a proto-Etruscan society, there is now some intriguing genetic evidence that settlers, including their cattle, may have arrived from the east and become integrated with the native population. In the relatively isolated region of Murlo, in the centre of ancient Etruria, for instance, a genetic variation has been found in the human population that is otherwise only found in Turkey. The problem remains in defining the size of any incoming populations, and, even more challenging, the dates at which they may have arrived, possibly long before 1200 BC.

Yet ultimately the Etruscans intrigue because they were a sophisticated civilization with a fine tradition of craftsmanship and some exhilarating achievements especially in sculpture. It is only recently that archaeology is allowing a more realistic assessment of who the Etruscans were and what they achieved. It is now clear that as early as 1200 BC the primitive agricultural economy of Etruria was becoming more complex and intensive, with an increased dependence on sheep, goats, and pigs. A larger population could be supported and by 900 BC it was becoming grouped in scattered villages on the plateaux of tufa (a soft volcanic rock) that are typical of the area. Each village had its own cemetery close by. The burials of the period are easily recognizable from the biconical urns of a dark pottery incised with simple decorations in which the ashes of the dead were placed. (A good, well-illustrated introduction to the Etruscans is Sybille Haynes, *Etruscan Civilization: A Cultural History*, London, 2000.)

One of the first sites of this period to be excavated, in the 1850s, was at Villanova, near the modern Bologna, and the name 'Villanovan' was given to the period. What later became the great cities of the Etruscan world, Veii, Tarquinia, Vulci, Cerveteri, all developed directly from these earlier Villanovan village sites. Later Villanovan sites developed on hilltops (Fiesole and the dramatic Volterra), and northwards into the Po valley. When the Greeks and Phoenicians first approached Etruria in the eighth century they found the Tyrrhenian Sea already bustling with Etruscan traders, who were working along the coast and across the sea to Sardinia which had its own well-established contacts with the eastern Mediterranean. (The name Tyrrhenian comes from the Greek word for Etruscan.) However the Etruscans jealously guarded their own territory and the early foreign traders had to contact them from offshore.

What the Etruscans had to offer the visitors from the east was metal. The Colline Metallifere, the metal-bearing hills above what became the major Etruscan cities of Populonia and Vetulonia, yielded iron, copper, and silver. The deposits were already being exploited locally but now Etruscan aristocrats began exchanging the metals for the goods of the east, pottery and finished metalwork. Local cemeteries show the results. The most extensively excavated is that at Quattro Fontanili, a cemetery of the

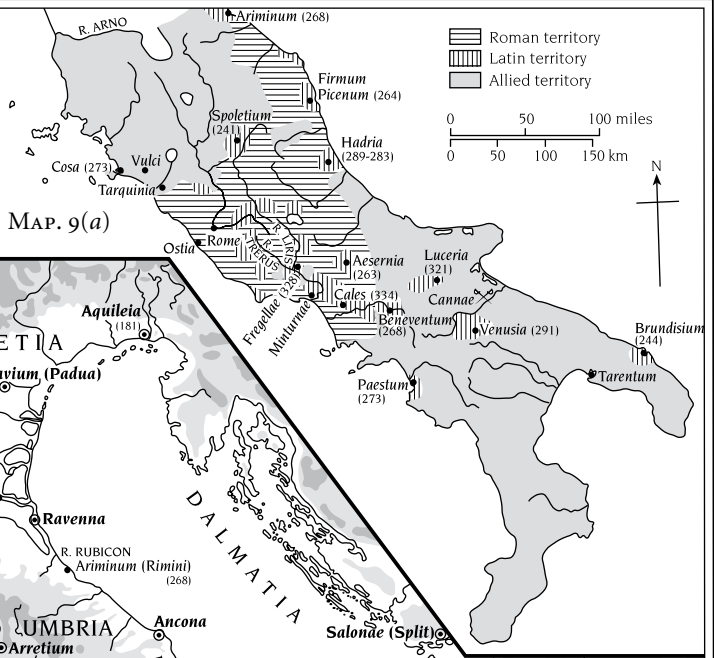
important southern town of Veii, one of the first to make direct contact with the east. After about 760 BC burials show an increased use of iron. It is beaten into the status symbols of a warrior aristocracy, helmets, swords and shields, chariots and horse-bits, and implements for feasting. Women are buried with jewellery. The influences in this 'orientalizing' period are from the east in general, including Phoenicia and Syria, rather than simply from Greece (where Corinth predominates). The easterners' settlement at Pithekoussai on Ischia (see also p. 150) was a cosmopolitan one.

Etruscan society was formed of clans each with its own leader with whom his followers identified. Warfare between rival clans may have involved local chieftains fighting on horseback backed by lightly armed retainers. Although some pieces of hoplite armour were imported from Greece there is no significant evidence at this date that the Etruscans adopted the phalanx and fought as equal members of a community as the Greeks did. This is warfare between individuals, and it is possible that the Roman triumph (see the end of this chapter) originated with the Etruscans as the celebration, and public assertion of his authority, by a victorious chieftain. Some sources talk of Etruscan kings, and it may be that each settlement had its own supreme ruler with 'a gold crown, an ivory throne, a sceptre surmounted by an eagle, a purple tunic threaded with gold and a cloak, also of purple, with embroidered decoration', as one later Roman account puts it.

Rivalry between local aristocrats led to the emergence of more consolidated and better-protected settlements. The tufa plateaux already offered good defence but from possibly as early as 700 BC they were fortified with tufa blocks. (Cerveteri is an example.) This initiated a tradition of building massive fortified walls that reached its peak in the fifth and fourth centuries when the Etruscan cities were threatened by both Romans and Celts. The evidence from tombs of this earlier period suggests a small aristocratic elite whose cultural life was increasingly influenced by their contacts with Greece. The Greek alphabet was adopted about 700 BC and literacy maintained by the elite as a status symbol. In the decorated burial chambers of the aristocratic tombs of Tarquinia and on the plaques from Poggio Civitate (see below), paintings and reliefs show a lifestyle centring on hunting and banqueting. In the banqueting scenes couples recline on couches in *symposia* and the Athenian game of *kottabos* is in full swing but here the couples are not, as in Athens, men with their *hetairai* but Etruscans with their wives. It is a lifestyle reminiscent of an earlier aristocratic age of Greece, the world of Odysseus and Penelope, rather than that of democratic Athens.

Greek commentators, notably the fourth-century historian Theopompus, were shocked enough by the public appearance of women to condemn Etruscan society as a sexual free-for-all, with women playing as much part as men in initiating encounters with men, boys, and other women. In practice, upper-class Etruscan women appear to have been treated with respect and affection and they are portrayed in carriages, sumptuously dressed, and as spectators at games (including chariot-racing, a Greek sport later passed on to enthusiastic Romans). Inscriptions give children the names of both their fathers and mothers. An elegant sandal with gold laces was known to the Greeks as 'Etruscan'.

ROME AND HER ALLIES IN THE THIRD CENTURY BC MAP 9(a)



MAP. 9(a)



ETRUSCAN AND ROMAN ITALY MAP 9(b)

MAP. 9(b)



FINAL ROMAN NAVAL
VICTORY OVER
CARTHAGINIANS 241

Altitude in metres
Over 1000
200 – 1000
0 – 200

0 25 50 75 100 miles
0 50 100 150 km

It was the paintings within the tombs that gave Lawrence his picture of the Etruscans, but this does not mean that Etruscan life, even for the elite, was a parade of banquets interspersed by hunting. The pictures of banqueting, for instance, may represent the hopes of the deceased for life in the future world (as in Egypt) or may record a transitional meal between the world of the living and the world of the dead. (By the fourth century BC some banquets include demons and other symbols of the underworld in them, a development which some have linked to the increasing threat from Rome.) Similarly the Greek pottery that fills the later tombs (and provides 80 per cent of the known surviving Attic vases) may have been attractive for its associations with the world of the dead and the hopes of some afterlife for those who have carried out heroic deeds. The story of Heracles, a mortal figure who becomes immortal through his labours, is a popular theme that was highlighted by Athenian potters working specifically for the Etruscan market.

As their prosperity grew the Etruscans expanded southwards. Their influence spread over the entire plain of Campania, rich land in itself but also a meeting place with the Greeks. There was a Greek colony at Cumae on the mainland about 725 and the Etruscans themselves were developing their own coastal centres. With the growing importance of trade and craftsmanship, Etruscan cities on the major hilltop sites such as Volterra were expanding. (These elevated sites also offered better protection against the malaria that haunted the marshy plains.) The towns of Latium, among them Rome with its important position on the Tiber, now also came under Etruscan control and Etruscan influence spread eastwards. There is some evidence for urban settlement in Umbria and the peoples there used Etruscan script to record their distinctive dialect (as in the Iguvine tablets, a set of religious tracts, discovered in 1444 in the town of Gubbio, and still on display in the museum there). Greek craftsmen now begin to settle, and Etruscan craftsmen acquired skills in working gold, silver, and ivory from them. (The cultural relationship between the Greeks and the Etruscans is fully explored by John Boardman in his *The Diffusion of Classical Art in Antiquity*, Princeton and London, 1995.)

One original Etruscan creation is *bucchero*, a shiny black pottery. From about 650 it was being traded along the French and Spanish coasts. In the sixth century trade in manufactured goods was given new impetus by migrants from Greece. One aristocrat, Demaratus, is recorded as fleeing from tyranny in Corinth in the middle of the century and setting up his business in Etruria. It was possibly under his influence that the Etruscans copied metal relief work in clay and so developed terracotta, used at first for the decoration of temples. Terracotta later provides some of the most attractive of Etruscan 'sculptures', married couples reclining on couches and a magnificent set of horses from Tarquinia, now in the museum there.

Particularly fascinating is an impressive complex of buildings at Poggio Civitate near Murlo (dated to between 650 and 575 BC). This is an important site, in its earliest form a residence with a manufacturing workshop attached. After a fire in the early sixth century it was rebuilt in the shape of a substantial building with four wings enclosing courtyards. It is unique in size for this period in the Mediterranean. Whether the residence of a local clan leader or a ritual or political centre, it

was finely decorated and shows the combined influence of Greek and Villanovan styles. Roof-tiles had been adopted from Greece, while *acroteria*, raised images placed on the roof, in this case of human figures both male and female, originated in Etruria. There was a frieze of terracotta plaques and these are overwhelmingly aristocratic in their themes; they show mounted warriors, a horse race, a procession, possibly of a newly married couple and their attendants, a banquet, and a row of seated figures with their attendants.

Livy said that the Etruscans were more religious than any other people. It is difficult to give much meaning to such a statement but ritual was certainly important and the remains of sanctuaries show that the Etruscans sought divine help for their daily needs. They created a pantheon of gods drawn from many sources, some local, some Greek. (Two-thirds of the Olympian gods have an Etruscan equivalent.) Each god had his or her own place in the sky, and an understanding of the pleasure or displeasure of the gods could be gained from watching the flight of birds, flashes of lightning, or any other unusual event. The augurs, responsible for interpreting the signs, would then prescribe the correct rituals for their appeasement.

The augurs would carry out their duties standing within a sacred area set apart on high ground. (The area was known to the Romans as a *templum*, the origin of the word 'temple'.) Perhaps as early as 600 BC the Etruscans built temples immediately behind the sacred area. The model is the Greek temple but the emphasis is on a highly decorated façade and an entrance only at the front. The *podium* on which the temple rested is much higher than in Greece and the augur may have stood on its edge to make his divinations. A late example, the Ara della Regina temple at Tarquinia, from the first half of the fourth century, stood on a podium of 77 by 34 metres on the summit of a hillside commanding a site which had been sacred for centuries before this. The Romans adopted the Etruscan temple as their model, most notably in the great temple to Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva on the Capitoline Hill begun in the late sixth century when an Etruscan 'king' still ruled Rome. The Romans drew heavily on Etruscan beliefs, and the rules of divination, the *disciplina*, were carefully preserved by them.

The heyday of Etruscan city life came in the sixth and early fifth centuries BC. Each city was independent but its representatives met each year in a league of twelve cities, an idea possibly adopted from the Panhellenic festivals of the Greeks. The idea of a planned city centre also appears to have been adopted from the Greeks. Roads and bridges between cities reflect the sophistication of Etruscan engineering. For the inland cities, prosperity swelled the classes who were benefiting from trade and comparative peace. The authority of the aristocratic leaders appears to have been diluted as greater numbers of better-armed citizens were brought into the city forces and so a more egalitarian society emerged. Burial customs reflect the changes. At Cerveteri from about 500 BC individual burial chambers are replaced by what is a city of the dead with tombs arranged in streets, each one with a façade in the shape of a house carved in the tufa. Family tombs are surrounded by more modest burial places for what might be servants or retainers.

Along the coast conditions were not so secure. Etruscan supremacy came under threat from about 550 BC as new waves of Greeks fled from Persian expansion. The Phocaean colony at Alalia in eastern Corsica was particularly threatening. In 540 BC the Etruscans, with some Phoenician support, defeated the Phocaeans at sea and forced the abandonment of the settlement, but the Phocaeans had also settled in southern France and they now blocked off Etruscan trade there. Meanwhile the Carthaginians (Phoenicians who had established the city of Carthage and made it a springboard for further colonization) had consolidated their position in Sardinia and on the western coast of Sicily and gradually forced the Etruscans off the sea. At Pyrgi, the port of Cerveteri, a striking set of gold plaques contains a bilingual dedication by a ruler of Cerveteri, Thefarie Velianas, to the Phoenician goddess Astarte, who is equated with the Etruscan Uni (the Etruscan equivalent to Hera and the forerunner of the Roman Juno). It has been suggested that Thefarie Velianas was a tyrant of Carthaginian origin who had been imposed on Cerveteri. The Etruscans were now also under pressure from the Greek tyrants in Sicily. An expedition led by Etruscans with native mercenaries against the Greek city of Cumae in about 525 BC failed and in 474 BC Hiero of Syracuse defeated an Etruscan fleet off Cumae. The Etruscan presence in Campania was eliminated in the fifth century by the Samnites, a mountain people who now began raiding into the plains.

As the Carthaginians became dominant in the Tyrrhenian Sea, the coastal cities of Etruria went into decline. Inland cities including Clusium (a ruler of Clusium, Lars Porsenna, features among Rome's early enemies), Fiesole, Cortona, Volsinii (the modern Orvieto), and Veii continued to flourish, largely because they were exploiting their land so successfully. (The remains of large irrigation schemes dating from the fifth century have been found around Veii.) The league of twelve cities survived but lacked any kind of political vigour. No city came to the help of Veii when it was attacked by Rome in the late fifth century.

What trade remained had now to be directed across the Apennines in the Po valley. A new Etruscan city near the present town of Marzabotto, at the foot of the Apennines, was laid out in about 500 BC. Once again its carefully planned regular streets and distinction between a public and a residential area suggest the influence of Greek town planning. Other Etruscan foundations include the modern cities of Ravenna, Rimini, and Bologna. One of the most successful trading cities was Spina on the Po delta, built, as Venice would be, on wooden piles with bridges and canals between the buildings. Here the Etruscans met the Greeks in a city that seems as much Greek as Etruscan and which has proved the richest source of Attic vases of any Etruscan city. However, here too the Etruscan presence was threatened by a number of forces, including the eventual silting up of Spina and the migration of 'Celtic' war-bands across the Alps. There is some evidence of intermarriage between the newcomers and Etruscans and new trade routes were forged with the tribal groups of northern Europe (producing the La Tène culture, see p. 356) but the Etruscan cities of central Italy were now falling into steady decline and were eventually defeated and destroyed by Rome in the third century.

The decline of the Etruscans was one of the factors that made the fifth and fourth centuries an age of crisis in Italy. In the north Celtic groups were occupying the Po valley and raiding down further into the peninsula. A host of different mountain peoples began to plunder the plains. They may have been driven by population pressures but many had also acquired military skills from service as mercenaries and so had developed the confidence to attack the wealthy Greek and Etruscan cities of the lowlands. Almost every Greek city of south-west Italy was overrun in the fifth century.

The Foundation of Rome

It was in this world of turmoil and changing fortunes that Rome, a small settlement on the plain of Latium, was to emerge as the major power in Italy in the fourth century. The earlier history of the city has proved very difficult to reconstruct. Later Roman historians drew on a variety of legends from both Greek and Roman sources to create their own version of the city's foundation. There was a Greek story, later exploited by Virgil in the *Aeneid*, of Aeneas fleeing from the fall of Troy and eventually settling in Latium, where he founded a line of kings at Alba Longa. There was a separate legend of twins, Romulus and Remus, who were abandoned by the side of the river Tiber, saved by being suckled by a wolf, and then brought up by shepherds. One of the most intriguing exhibits in the Capitoline museums is indeed a fine bronze wolf originally believed to have been an Etruscan bronze of the fifth century BC. (While it was always known that the suckling twins had been added in the Renaissance, many now believe that the wolf itself is, in fact, medieval, so this image of this great icon of early Rome is sadly tarnished.) In the legend Romulus killed his brother after a quarrel and went on to found Rome. The two stories were linked by making Romulus and Remus the children of the daughter of one of the Alban kings and Mars, the god of war. A date for the foundation of the city of 753 BC was enshrined so effectively in national mythology that a thousand years later the emperor Philip the Arab visited Rome specifically to host an extravagant celebration of the anniversary. (An excellent introduction to the early history of Rome is provided by T. J. Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome: Italy and Rome from the Bronze Age to the Punic Wars (c.1000–246 BC)*, London and New York, 1995.)

There were other early histories of the city but these have been almost entirely lost. The earliest, that of Fabius Pictor at the end of the third century, now surviving only in fragments, was designed to emphasize a Greek heritage in an age when Greek culture was still pre-eminent. The first histories to consist of more than fragments date from the first century BC. The most important is that of Titus Livius (Livy). Livy was a native of Patavium (the modern Padua), and he was writing just as Rome's republican government was being transformed by Octavian, the future Augustus (see Chapter 25). His aim was to glorify the dying republic, and his is a dramatic narrative account of the city's history with an emphasis on the epic. The entry of the Gauls into Rome and their butchery of the august senators who awaited

them silently in their robes in their courtyards, the emotions as news of victory or defeat reaches Rome, the great battle scenes during the war with Hannibal still haunt the reader. (The hamstringing of the Roman soldiers after the Battle of Cannae remained in my memory without my rereading it for over thirty years.) However, as a work of history, Livy's account is limited. His bias towards the glorification of the republic, his shaky grasp of geography, and the carelessness with which he draws on earlier sources make the work unreliable. The historian has to exploit other, more fragmentary, accounts, the consul lists and the histories of great families that were passed from generation to generation, as well as archaeology, to piece together the early history of the city. Even so there are periods of Rome's history (390–350 BC for instance) about which almost nothing is known.

Rome grew up on the banks of the Tiber at a site where an island (the Tiber island) divided the river into two narrower channels and allowed bridging. The city seems to have originated, perhaps as early as the tenth century, as a scatter of villages on low-lying hills (the celebrated seven hills of Rome). The curve of the river provided a good landing place and goods could be shipped overland from Rome, both to the north and south. Close by were the Sabine peoples and early legend told of the seizure of their women as Roman wives, although the relationship may have been less brutal than that. From early times salt was traded into the Sabine country and beyond into Umbria. Some cemeteries have survived from this period, and the site of what was to be the Forum (the city's market-place but later its ceremonial centre) was used as a burial place until the early eighth century. The bodies had been burned and placed in urns.

In the eighth century, the period in which the legends place the foundation of the city, there is evidence for the arrival of Greek traders. Pottery from Euboea and Corinth has been found, and one seventh-century grave on the Esquiline Hill contained a Corinthian vase with its owner's name, Ktektos, inscribed on it. From the very earliest times Rome was open to the gods and goddesses of Greece—a vase from Athens of the sixth century BC with a representation of the smith-god Hephaestus has been found as a votive deposit at the sanctuary of the Roman equivalent, Volcanus. The archaeological evidence shows that Rome, like most successful trading cities, attracted a range of outsiders, from both Italy and the east. This may account for much of its early vitality. At the same time the city continued to share a common 'Latin' culture with some thirty communities that were scattered over the plains of Latium between the river Tiber and the Alban Hills. These communities shared a language, festivals, and the myth of a common origin (that they were all colonies of a single city, Alba Longa). They also enjoyed so-called 'Latin rights' which allowed their citizens to make a legal marriage and commercial contracts with any member of another Latin community and to acquire citizenship of another community simply by moving there.

In the eighth and seventh centuries some form of transformation of society was taking place in Latium, similar in many ways to what was happening in Etruria. Although it pays to be cautious with the fragmentary evidence, society may have been increasingly based on clans with some individuals emerging as aristocratic

leaders. The catalyst would seem to be trade with the outside world and the increasing influence of the Etruscans.

Rome: The Age of Kings

From the eighth through to the end of the sixth century Rome was ruled by 'kings'. Almost nothing is known of these early rulers and their names and stories attached to them must be seen to be legendary. Kingship was not hereditary and each new king seems to have been acclaimed by the people of Rome meeting in the *comitia curiata*, an assembly of thirty groups of clans, after auspices had first been taken to ensure he had divine support. (The taking of auspices became a part of any political and religious activity in Rome.) He now had *imperium*, divine authority through which he could exercise his power in political, military, and religious affairs. The symbol of *imperium* was the *fasces*, a bundle of rods bound round an axe that was carried in front of the king. It originated with the Etruscans and it is in this same period that Etruscan influence became pervasive. King Tarquin I (traditional dates 616–579 BC), for instance, is recorded as having migrated to Rome from Etruria and engineered his acclamation as king. With him came the first public embellishment of the city. The Forum was paved and surrounded by ceremonial buildings, including temples and sanctuaries, and an open area cleared for assemblies of citizens. The remains of palaces suggest the city was controlled by an aristocratic elite. (However, Rome remained predominantly Latin in culture. Under the Lapis Niger, a black pavement found in the Forum (and traditionally the burial place of the shepherd who looked after Romulus and Remus), are sixth-century ceremonial inscriptions in Latin, not Etruscan.)

Legend tells how Tarquin was murdered in 579 and his successor Servius Tullius, probably a Latin rather than an Etruscan, seized power by force. It was clearly a time of upheaval in the city and Servius Tullius might be compared with the Greek tyrants (see Chapter 11) who swept to power on a wave of popular resentment against an aristocratic elite. There is evidence that Servius expanded the citizen body by enfranchising the local rural population and, more important than this, by creating a citizen army of all those able to afford arms. This was the first legion, with a reported strength of 4,000 men and 600 cavalry. The men were grouped into centuries (probably of ninety-six men each). At some point, possibly in Servius' reign, it became customary to call the centuries together to meet on the Campus Martius, the Field of Mars, outside the city wall. The *comitia centuriata*, as this assembly was called later, became the most powerful of the Roman popular assemblies with the formal duty of declaring war or peace and making alliances, as well as voting on constitutional changes. (In republican times it formed the electoral body for the consuls and praetors.)

This expansion of the citizen body was crucial to Rome's later success. In Greece citizenship depended on membership of a *polis* community and it was a privilege jealously guarded against outsiders. It is certainly true that Rome was cautious

about accepting citizens until they had proved themselves loyal (and to some extent Romanized) but Rome was more open about extending her citizen body than any other city of the ancient world. To the astonishment of the Greeks even the descendants of freed slaves would become citizens as a matter of course. The result was a citizen body that grew rapidly. One consequence of this, however, was that the citizen assemblies became so large that democracy on the Athenian model soon became impractical and those who did attend the assemblies were restricted to voting for or against issues placed before them.

The Foundation of the Roman Republic

In the short term Servius' hopes of creating a popularly supported monarchy were to fail. His successor Tarquin the Proud (traditional dates 534–509 BC) behaved in such a tyrannical way that he was thrown out by the outraged aristocracy in 509. The final straw, according to legend, was the rape of one Lucretia by Tarquin's son. Rather than be shamed by a false accusation of adultery by her rapist, she chose to commit suicide. (The rape and suicide provided inspiration for many later European artists.) Some kind of power struggle appears to have followed. It may have been now that Lars Porsenna, ruler of a neighbouring Etruscan city, Clusium, attacked Rome. According to one legend, immortalized by the English historian Macaulay in his *Lays of Ancient Rome*, he was foiled by one Horatius holding a bridge against him, but there are some suggestions in the sources that he may have temporarily taken the city.

The final result, however, was a republican city which was now firmly under aristocratic control. The aristocracy were not necessarily anti-Etruscan. In fact Etruscan cultural influences persisted in Rome for some time. Rather, the elite proclaimed themselves the protectors of Rome against tyranny in general and this became central to the ideology through which they justified their political supremacy. From now on there would be intense suspicion of any individual who tried to use popular support to build personal power.

The aristocracy's fear of tyranny was revealed in the new government they set up. Supreme power, *imperium*, in fact all the power originally enjoyed by a king, was now to devolve on two magistrates, the consuls, who would hold power for one year but who could not be immediately re-elected. Each had the right to check the other's actions. Central to *imperium* was the right to command an army and it is probably at this time that the single Roman legion was split into two smaller legions with one available to each consul. (The centuries now became units of sixty rather than a hundred men.) *Imperium* was only effective outside the *pomerium*, the sacred central area of the city, and armed men could not be led into the city except to celebrate a triumph. (There is an excellent introduction: 'The Constitution of the Roman Republic' by J. A. North, in N. Rosenstein and R. Morstein-Marx (eds.), *A Companion to the Roman Republic*, Oxford, 2006.)

The consuls were elected by the *comitia centuriata* although their election still had to be given formal approval by the *comitia curiata*. Competition for office was

intense and election depended on a shrewd manipulation of votes by the candidate that stopped short of appealing to the populace as a whole (thus arousing the fear of tyranny among the elite). The composition of the *comitia centuriata* was arranged so that the wealthier classes of soldiers, the cavalry in particular, who voted first and by class, could overrule the poorer classes. A prospective consul thus had to build up support among the more influential citizens. He could do this through his own *auctoritas*, authority and rank achieved through military achievement, and the status of his family, but a candidate also relied heavily on clients, men who would vote for him in return for protection and favours. (The word 'candidate' originates with the custom of prospective consuls dressing in specially whitened togas for the election, earning themselves the name *candidati*, from the Latin *candidus*, white.)

As the needs of the city grew other magistracies were established. The quaestors were financial officials. There were originally two but, from 421, four were elected annually. Later as many as twenty would be needed. The censors took charge of the records of citizenship, probably mainly to list those eligible for military service. (The verb *censere* means 'to estimate'.) Unlike the other magistracies new censors were appointed only every five years for a period of some eighteen months while they drew up a revised list of citizens. It was an office of great authority later reserved for former consuls. The praetor, a term originally used of the consuls, became a separate post with special responsibility for judicial affairs in 366 BC. Praetors and consuls were the only magistrates with the right to command an army.

With the magistrates normally confined to a single year of office and the *comitia centuriata* limited to voting (rather than debating), discussion of policy-making increasingly became the preserve of the senate. The senate had originated as a group of advisers to the kings and most senators were drawn from a group of ancient aristocratic families, the patricians, who also monopolized the priesthoods of Rome. After the fall of the monarchy the members of the senate seem to have been chosen each year by the consuls as *their* advisers, but the right to decide membership then devolved to the censors. One of them, Appius Claudius, caused outrage in the late fourth century when he tried to pack the senate with men from outside the traditional aristocratic families, and in the reaction that followed it became the custom for the senate to be made up of former magistrates who joined immediately after they had served their term of office. They then remained senators for life. The body thus contained a vast reservoir of collective experience and was to provide an impressive stability and continuity in Roman government during years of tumultuous change. The senate was presided over by a consul or praetor. It had few formal powers but it could express its feelings in a *senatus consultum*, the advice of the senate, which had no strict legal effect, but which came to be respected as if it did. The assemblies normally only passed legislation after they had heard the senate's opinion.

In the fifth century the patrician families consolidated their grip on government. Patricians took 90 per cent of the consulships between 485 and 445 BC. However, their growing power was soon challenged by the *plebs*, plebeians, the mass of citizens who by law or custom had become excluded from the magistracies and the

senate. The discontent of the plebeian masses was rooted in land hunger, economic distress (in a period of almost continuous warfare), and debt, but there must have been wealthier leaders with the leisure to organize agitation against the patricians. These conflicts over status and access to resources continued for 200 years. The weapon of the *plebs* was withdrawal from the city, probably to the Aventine Hill, where they set up their own assembly, the *concilium plebis*. It elected its own officials, the tribunes, eventually ten in number, whose persons were declared sacrosanct and who acquired the right to intervene on behalf of ordinary citizens against the arbitrary use of power by a magistrate.

A patrician family disappeared whenever it failed to produce a male heir. So the 132 patrician families recorded in 509 BC had dwindled to 81 in 367 BC. The patricians were in retreat and so had to accommodate themselves to pressures from the plebeians. They recognized the right of the *concilium plebis* to exist as early as 471 although it was not until 287 that its resolutions (*plebiscita*, hence the English 'plebiscite') were accepted as having the force of law. In the middle of the fifth century plebeian agitation resulted in the recording and publication of the Twelve Tables, the first public statement of Roman law. The magistracies were gradually opened to plebeians, the first plebeian quaestors being appointed in 409. After 342 one consul was always a plebeian. Both consuls were plebeians for the first time in 172 BC.

The plebeians did not achieve a social revolution in Rome, although there were some successes such as the abolition of *nexum*, a form of debt bondage, at the end of the fourth century. What happened in effect was that the wealthier plebeians became integrated into the ruling classes, the magistracies and the senate. Access to office and hence to the senate by an outsider was possible (the term *novus homo*, 'new man', was used of the first member of a family to achieve a magistracy) but comparatively rare and so Rome saw the continued consolidation of oligarchical rule by a limited number of aristocratic families. Even the tribunes were drawn from the wealthier classes, and although the *concilium plebis* could act as a focus of popular agitation at moments of economic distress it never developed a coherent and sustained role as an opposition.

The cohesion of the state was also maintained through religious ritual. State ceremony was focused on the Capitoline Hill. Tarquin the Elder, the fifth Etruscan king, had laid the foundations of the first temple to Jupiter there and it was at the temple that the magistrates offered sacrifice on taking office and the first meeting of the senate each year took place. The spoils of war were brought here at the end of each triumphal procession by a victorious general. The so-called Capitoline Triad came to be made up, from the fourth century, of Juno, an ancient Italian goddess, associated with the needs of women, fertility, and the sanctity of marriage, who was now venerated as the wife of Jupiter, and Minerva, an Italian goddess of crafts, and each had their own cella within the temple. Another important state god was, perhaps inevitably, Mars, the god of war. Mars gave his name to the month of March, originally the first in the year and the time when military campaigning could begin again after the winter. These state gods were honoured through complex rituals overseen by priests chosen from members of the aristocratic families. Everyday religious activity was

focused on a wide variety of other gods and spirits. Many of them—for instance, Vesta, the goddess of the hearth, the Lares, spirits of the land who protected the household, the Penates, the gods of the store cupboard—originated in the home and reflected the needs of a community largely dependent on agriculture.

The Expansion of Rome

The integration of patrician and plebeian and the relatively smooth transition to a republican society was largely a response to continuous outside pressure. Under the kings Rome had been a successful military state and in 509 controlled about 800 square kilometres, a third of Latium. Its population has been estimated as between 20,000 and 25,000, very much bigger than that of any other Latin community, and comparable to the larger Greek cities of southern Italy. Soon after the fall of the monarchy, however, the city was challenged by the surrounding Latin tribes, who were suspicious of her continued expansion. Rome defeated them at the Battle of Lake Regillus in 499 BC, but the victory was overshadowed by increasing pressures of the mountain peoples on the Latin plains. In 493 Rome agreed with the Latin communities to face the intruders together.

The most persistent enemies were two peoples, the Aequi and the Volscii, who began launching a series of raids on the outlying Latin settlements. They successfully disrupted the economy of the plain, and in Rome itself there is a significant gap in public building in the middle of the fifth century. Even though the Hernici, whose land lay between the Aequi and Volscii, were added as allies of Rome, it took until the end of the century to restore order. With the situation more stable, Rome now moved on her own initiative against a very different enemy, an old rival, the once wealthy Etruscan city of Veii. The city was only 15 kilometres to the north, but its prosperity, fine hilltop position, and control of the upper Tiber through Fidenae, its outpost 9 kilometres upstream from Rome, made it a coveted prize. The legends recount ten years of siege, on the epic scale of the Trojan War, before the city fell in 396 BC.

For later generations, this was the moment when Rome's rise to greatness began. So also began the tradition of *evocatio*, the bringing of a foreign god, in this case the Etruscan Juno, from Veii into Rome where her cult was established strictly under Roman control by merging her with Jupiter. Hercules (the Greek Heracles) was to be brought in from the east and adopted as a state cult, Hercules the Invincible, in 312. In 291, Apollo's 'son', Asclepius, the god of healing, was imported and a temple to him erected on the Tiber island (where a hospital stands even today). Roman religion became a series of interlocking cults and festivals whose rituals became sacrosanct. As with the Greeks and Romans, games played a part in these festivals and already the valley of the Circus Maximus, to the west of the Palatine Hill, was being used for chariot-racing. By 329 BC it had permanent starting gates for the chariots. The games offered a particularly open form of display for the elite, who were given seats according to their status, but the rest of the audience would also vent their

support or disapproval of individual senators so the games became a political forum as well.

Rome's success against Veii probably reflected its ability to mobilize its manpower in a way the Etruscan cities could never do. The war brought an enlargement of both infantry and cavalry forces. Poorer classes were now enlisted and a daily cash allowance, the *stipendium*, was paid while a man was away from his farm. (Only those who owned land were eligible for the army.) As the poorer citizens could not afford a full covering of armour, an oblong shield, the *scutum*, was adopted instead of the smaller circular 'hoplite' shield.

In this new atmosphere a 'sack' of Rome by Celtic raiders in 390 was probably no more than a temporary setback caused by a band of mercenaries who were heading south to Dionysius' Syracuse. Even so, the episode haunted the imagination of later generations. Livy presents it as a devastating experience and one cannot help comparing it to the shock effect of the sack of Rome of AD 410 almost exactly 800 years later (see below, p. 632). One response was the so-called Servian Walls of the early fourth century, sections of which are still extant in Rome. Their very extent, a circle of some 11 kilometres, shows what energy the city could divert to such a major building project.

Few sources survive for this period of Roman history but it appears to have been one of consolidation. Over 500 square kilometres of land confiscated from Veii had to be integrated into the *ager Romanus* (Roman territory). There was continual low level warfare against surrounding tribes and the fortification of Ostia at the mouth of the Tiber, which archaeological evidence dates to 380–350 BC, suggests a growing interest in the sea, although no Roman navy was to exist for another hundred years. Successful trade was probably as important a factor in boosting the prosperity of Rome as successful conquest.

A new period of more intensive warfare began in 343 with a short war against the Samnites, the most formidable and best organized of the inland mountain peoples. By the middle of the fourth century they had become the largest political grouping in Italy with territory covering perhaps 15,000 square kilometres. They had a well-developed system of agriculture, fortified mountain strongholds, and a history of successful expansion. (Two of the major peoples of southern Italy, the Lucanians and Bruttians, were descendants of earlier Samnite migrations.) Rome declared war on the Samnites in 343 after appeals for help by the cities of Campania. The Samnites were quickly defeated but, to the fury of the Campanians, Rome made peace with them. It was just at the moment that the Latin states were also becoming resentful of the arrogance of Roman rule. Rome suddenly found herself facing a coalition of enemies, Latins, Campanians, and once again the Volscii. Rome's reputation as a military power was confirmed when she defeated them.

It was the settlement of 338, after this war, which showed Rome's political acumen. Her enemies were not destroyed but instead reorganized into what has been described as a 'commonwealth' of states that stretched across the coastal plains from the Tiber to the bay of Naples. All accepted the dominance of Rome and agreed to

provide armed support when called upon. Some Latin cities close to Rome now lost their independence and were incorporated into the Roman state. The ships of the coastal city of Antium, for instance, had their prows (*rostra*, literally 'beaks') cut off and displayed as trophies on the speaker's platform in Rome. (Hence the word *rostrum* still used in English for a platform.) The members of these communities became full Roman citizens and could vote in the Roman assemblies. Other Latin communities kept their Latin rights, of intermarriage and commercial dealings, with Rome but not with each other. Their inhabitants were not made Roman citizens and remained self-governing.

The system provided opportunities, even a share of plunder, for those prepared to acquiesce in Roman hegemony. There was a chance of an evolution towards greater participation. Among the defeated non-Latin communities, the Volscii and the Campanians, for instance, Rome developed the status of *civitas sine suffragio*, a form of Roman citizenship which involved communities in the obligations of citizenship, notably military service, but without any of the advantages, such as voting or the right to stand for office in Rome. Each of these cities was known as a *municipium*. In the passage of time the citizens of these *municipia* were given full citizenship, the last by the end of the second century BC. (For *municipia* in the empire, see further p. 511.)

In addition Rome now began to establish colonies. (The word derives from the Latin verb *colere*, to cultivate.) The citizens of each colony, who could be Romans or other Latins, gave up Roman citizenship if they had it but maintained Latin rights and formed self-governing communities. They had every incentive to defend themselves, and hence Roman hegemony, against attack, and many colonies were established in strategically vulnerable areas. Two early colonies, Cales and Fregellae, were set up in the Liris valley on the main route from Rome to the important *municipium* of Capua. The site of another, Interamna Lirenas, founded in AD 312 in the same area, has recently been identified. Colonies could be used to settle former soldiers or remove surplus populations and proved a superb way of spreading the Roman way of life. Some, Aquileia in north-eastern Italy, for instance, grew into major cities in their own right.

Often given less importance in the Roman sources but no less crucial were allies. By 250 Rome had made alliances with over 150 Italian communities who had either been defeated or forced through fear into surrender. Technically the allies maintained full independence, but they had to provide manpower for wars and Rome in effect decided when these wars should take place and how many men were needed. In many major battles, that of Sentinum in 295, for instance, allies provided more than half the Roman army. The soldiers of allies had, in theory, the right to share the fruits of victory on an equal basis with the legionaries.

The essence of the settlement of 338 was its flexibility. Rome could draw on a large reserve of manpower at almost no cost to herself while the defeated communities retained enough independence to dampen any desire for revolt. In any case many were controlled by aristocratic cliques who depended on Roman support for their own survival. Rome herself was not burdened with vast areas of new territory.

She had evolved a system of government and control that was to prove astonishingly resilient in the years to come.

Rome was soon at war again. The setting up of the new colony at Fregellae provoked the Samnites to attack. It took forty years (conventionally divided into two periods, 327–304 and 298–290, the Second and Third Samnite Wars) before they were defeated. This was guerrilla warfare in difficult mountain territory and Rome suffered a number of humiliating defeats when she ventured off the plains. A more successful long-term strategy involved consolidating a network of allies (among them, in 327, Neapolis (Naples), the first Greek city to make an alliance with Rome) around Samnite territory so that the Samnite heartland could be isolated. The first of Rome's great military roads, the Appian Way, between Rome and Capua, put in hand by the censor Appius Claudius in 312 BC, was part of the process of control. New fighting techniques had also to be developed to fight in hilly country. The hoplite formation of the Greeks was no good on rough ground so the legions were split into smaller groups, the maniples, or 'handfuls', of two centuries, each man armed relatively lightly with a *pilum*, a javelin which could be thrown, and a sword, *gladius*.

The last years of the Second Samnite War were marked by an expansion of Rome into the central highlands of Italy. In 304, Rome's enemies of the fifth century, the Aequi, were suppressed once and for all in a campaign of fifty days in which the inhabitants of each stronghold were massacred as it was captured. In 298 the Samnites were at war with Rome again and now they could draw on a mass of allies, Celts, Etruscans, and Umbrians, who had all been antagonized by Rome's aggression. Rome faced them at Sentinum in Umbria in 295. It was the greatest battle yet seen on Italian soil, with the Romans and their allies fielding perhaps 35,000 men. If the Romans had not diverted the Etruscans and Umbrians from the main battlefield, they might well have been defeated, but their hard-won victory broke up the alliance. After a final desperate battle at Aquilonia in 293 the Samnites were crushed and Rome was able to mop up the remaining opposition in central Italy. The defeated communities were made *municipia* or allies. In some cases their land was distributed among settlers from Rome and their populations made slaves. (The Romans argued that those who had been defeated were at the absolute mercy of the victors and thus could be made into slaves if they were not killed.)

With Rome dominant in central Italy and the Celts hemmed in through a network of Roman alliances with the cities of Etruria, Roman attention turned south. The Greek cities were now in decline and in the 280s several began to call for help from Rome against the attacks of native populations. As Rome responded, the most prosperous Greek city of the south, Tarentum, grew alarmed at this intrusion. When a Roman war fleet (the first ever recorded) ventured into Tarentum's waters in 282 it was attacked. Rome counter-attacked and Tarentum was close to being taken. The city appealed in desperation to Pyrrhus, the king of Epirus, an ambitious ruler on the lookout for conquest and glory. Pyrrhus arrived with a large and well-equipped army of some 20,000 men. This was the first Hellenistic army the Romans had ever seen and they proved vulnerable to its power and experience. At two

battles, Heraclea (280 BC) and Ausculum (279), the Romans were defeated but in each case Pyrrhus lost thousands of his own precious troops (hence the term 'Pyrrhic victory'). Rome's allies stood firm. Even with mercenaries (and the riches of the Greek cities would have allowed him to recruit many thousands) Pyrrhus realized he could not hope to wear down the Romans. After another check at the Battle of Beneventum in 275, Pyrrhus withdrew. Tarentum fell to Rome in 272 and Roman domination of the south of the peninsula was complete. There was now no area below a line between the modern cities of Pisa and Rimini (where a Roman colony, Ariminum, was established in 268) that was free of Roman control, as the city of Falerii found to its cost when it offended Rome in 241. It was crushed in a campaign lasting only six days.

Direct Roman influence over much of this territory was still limited. By 264 perhaps 20 per cent of the land surface of Italy had been made part of the *ager Romanus*, the directly controlled territory of Rome. In much of this land the local population had been enslaved or killed and it was now open to Roman settlement. Between 20,000 and 30,000 adult males may have been given plots of land to farm. Another 70,000 men and their families may have been involved in settling the nineteen new colonies recorded between 334 and 263 BC. Several of them controlled land of over 5,000 square kilometres in extent. However, these colonies and settlements lay in between cities and cultures that still retained their own languages and customs. Even though new Roman roads were soon striking their way over plains and mountains, it was to be another 200 years before Latin became the dominant language of the peninsula. Meanwhile local pride and traditions remained strong.

The Glorification of Victory

In the early first century BC, one of Rome's major enemies, Mithridates VI of Pontus, reflected on his opponents: 'They themselves say that their founders were brought up by the milk of a she-wolf so that the entire race has hearts of wolves, is insatiable of blood, and is ever greedy and lusting after power and riches.' No pre-industrial society has ever mobilized such a high percentage of its male population in war over such a long period of time as Rome. It is estimated that between 9 and 16 per cent of male citizens could be supported in her armies in normal times and 25 per cent at times of crisis. The supremacy of Rome in war depended not only on her manpower but on a mixture of ferocity in battle (even the dogs were cut up, recorded the historian Polybius of a Roman victory over a city in Spain) and comparative generosity over those defeated. It was a formidable combination that was to underlie the strategy of Roman imperialism in the centuries to come.

In Rome itself military victory was idealized. Wars were assumed to be just and the temples built during the Samnite Wars were based on Hellenistic victory cults. There were dedications to Victoria, Jupiter Victor, Bellona (an early Roman war goddess) Victrix, and Hercules Invictus ('the unconquered Hercules'). The earliest Roman silver coin, probably minted in connection with the building of the Via

Appia, has Mars, the god of war, on its obverse side. (The symbolic wolf of Romulus and Remus was always associated with Mars and it was said that the sanctuary of the god just outside Rome was surrounded by wolves.) The religion of Rome was integrated into its political life. Every campaign was initiated by consultation of the gods and sacrifices. Plunder was used to dedicate and furnish new temples, so many in fact that not all could be maintained. Two hundred and fifty years later the emperor Augustus was to boast that he had restored no less than 82 of them.

The culmination of a conqueror's success came in the triumph. A victorious general could claim the right from the senate to extend his *imperium* across the *pomerium* so that he could bring his troops in procession into the city and sacrifice at the temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill. For the day, the victor even dressed as Jupiter (as Pindar's athletes became divine at the moment of victory, so did Rome's commanders) and was crowned with a laurel wreath. He was preceded by the magistrates and senate, oxen for sacrifice, war booty, and his captives. He himself rode in a chariot with his family beside him. Behind the chariot came the troops, who had the right to shout not in triumph but to denigrate their commander. (At one of his triumphs Julius Caesar was taunted with tales of his homosexuality as a young man.) As the procession reached the Capitol the prisoners would be taken off to be executed and the general continued up the hill to place his wreath on the lap of the god. (A challenging approach to the history of the triumph is provided by Mary Beard, *The Roman Triumph*, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 2007.)

The triumph was an essential feature of Rome's militarism and can be analysed at many different levels. For a day the victor could be close to the gods. It was an occasion too for the glorification of his family who rode beside him. Yet the ritual itself was designed to make sure that the state kept ultimate control. The senate was always sensitive to any individual who used the triumph as a stepping-stone to political power (and later, as generals vied for the glory, insisted that at least 5,000 enemy dead be counted on the battlefield before one could be granted). In this sense the triumph was a way of controlling individual ambition by allowing it one moment of exultant expression. The reality of death was also incorporated into the ritual. Not only was the victor reminded of his own mortality but the state expressed its own power over the defeated through their executions at the height of the ceremony. Not least, as Rome expanded overseas, the triumph acted as the mechanism through which the treasures of Greece and other conquered nations entered a city that in the early third century was still isolated culturally from the Mediterranean world.

Rome's rise is exceptional in many ways. The sudden conquests of Alexander the Great had taken place because a brilliant individual had managed to dislocate a rival empire in a small number of set-piece battles. This was very different. The Romans managed a consistency over decades. It was not only the tenacity of their troops that mattered, it was their pragmatic approach to politics and alliances. The early legends showed that Rome was quite happy to draw on Trojan, Greek, Latin, and Sabine sources for its origins so there was never a sense of Latin exclusivity especially so far as citizenship was concerned. This meant that neighbouring peoples could be drawn into alliances and other political and economic relationships. The

links between the aristocratic families of different cities, each anxious to maintain their status from popular challenge, seems to have been an important factor in creating cohesion. However, in Rome itself these families were also ready to accommodate the plebeians so that a coherent and flexible political system emerged. The incorporation of freed slaves, most of them from alien cultures, into Roman citizenship further diluted any sense of there being a Roman 'race'. Here was a launching pad for further conquest.

In 265 BC Rome's power extended only as far as northern Italy where the Celts provided a major barrier to further expansion. (NB Although the term 'Celt' is used here and below, readers should be aware of the difficulties it poses—see Interlude 5.) In the rest of the peninsula she was the dominant power in the sense that, despite the survival of local cultures and languages, there was no city or people able to challenge the combined strength of her own manpower and that of her allies. However, any expansion further afield appeared unlikely. Rome had no navy and had, in fact, already made treaties with Carthage, the major sea power of the western Mediterranean, in which she accepted Carthaginian supremacy at sea. Yet in the next 120 years Rome was to transform herself into a major Mediterranean power with interests as far west as Spain and east as far as Asia and the Aegean.

The First Punic War

The incident which set Rome on the path to becoming a Mediterranean power was a relatively insignificant one. A group of Italian mercenaries, who called themselves the Mamertines (after the Oscan name for Mars, the god of war), had seized the city of Messana (modern Messina), which overlooked the straits between Sicily and Italy. In 265 the ruler of Syracuse, Hiero, had tried to dislodge them. While some Mamertines looked to Carthage for help, others appealed to Rome. The senate hesitated. It was reluctant to condone the seizure and risk direct confrontation with wealthy Syracuse but a Carthaginian takeover in Messana would threaten Roman control of the straits, of new importance following Rome's conquest of the south. The debate was taken to the popular assembly (the *comitia centuriata*), and, after speeches by the consuls stressing the threat to Rome and the hope of plunder (a catalyst which was growing in importance), it was the assembly who committed the state to action, the only example known when the citizen body, rather than the senate, set in hand a war.

Faced now with a Roman response, the Carthaginians meekly withdrew their garrison from Messana and the Romans occupied the city. Although Carthage and Syracuse were long-standing enemies, the occupation was sufficiently provocative to force them into an alliance. When they jointly besieged Messana the outbreak of war, the First Punic War (264–241 BC), was the inevitable result. (*Punicus* is the

Latin for Carthaginian and refers to the joint culture of the Phoenicians and local African natives formed at Carthage.)

Carthage owed its wealth to its position. Set on a commanding site on a peninsula on the north African coast the city had begun life in the ninth century as a colony of the Phoenicians. As the Phoenician coastal cities were overrun in the seventh century, in turn by Assyrians, Egyptians, and Persians, Carthage emerged as an independent city ideally suited to act as the focus for the commerce of the other former Phoenician colonies of the western Mediterranean. Her dominance over them was gradually established. She expanded into north Africa, Spain, Sardinia, Sicily, and the other islands of the western Mediterranean, successfully protecting her interests against the Greeks despite a series of debilitating wars in Sicily with Syracuse and the other Greek cities. In north Africa she may have ruled over three to four million subjects. In southern Spain she had access to some of the richest silver mines in the known world. Her wealth came from trade in metals but also from the successful exploitation of fertile land in north Africa, western Sicily, and elsewhere. Her seamen were expert and there are (unsubstantiated) reports of Carthaginian voyages around Africa and as far north as Britain and Ireland. (See Richard Miles, *Carthage Must Be Destroyed: The Rise and Fall of an Ancient Civilization*, London and New York, 2010, for an excellent study of events from a Carthaginian perspective.)

Carthage's predominant interest was the preservation of her commercial empire, and Rome, without a navy, could offer no threat to this. The earlier agreements between the two states were now swept away as Sicily became the focus for the struggle. Carthage, with a history of 150 years' occupation of the western half of the island, was determined to hold on to her possessions. For the first three years (264–261) the campaigns were concentrated here. There were some Roman successes. Rome managed to prise Hiero of Syracuse away from Carthage and make him an ally and to take the wealthy city of Acragas, famous for its set of temples stretched along a dominant ridge, which had been held by a Carthaginian garrison. (The entire Greek population of the city—possibly 25,000 individuals—was sold into slavery.) However, the campaigns ended in stalemate. Rome's chances of subduing the coastal cities were limited so long as Carthage was in control of the sea, and it was immediately after the capture of Acragas that Rome decided to build a fleet.

No better proof could be given of the self-confidence of the city and its determination to win. There was no naval tradition, no experience of shipbuilding, no trained crews. According to Polybius, a grounded Carthaginian quinquireme had to be used as a model with crews being trained on land as the first hundred were being built. Greeks played a large part in training the new crews and remained an important element in the earliest Roman navies. The quinquiremes, which originated in Syracuse, had two superimposed banks of oars with each unit consisting of three oarsmen on the lower oar and two on the upper (so *quinque*, five, oarsmen). They were broad and not easy to manoeuvre for an effective ram but carried troops who hoped to board their opponents. (Maritime archaeology is now finding remains of some, and these show the sophisticated and efficient way in which they were built.) The Roman

equivalent was heavier than the Carthaginian ships and their crews, of course, without experience, but they contained one significant improvement, a wooden gangway that could be hauled up like the jib of a crane and then dropped on to an enemy ship so that soldiers could cross over into it. Its shape earned it the nickname *corvus*, 'crow'.

The war could now be fought by Rome at sea and possibly even taken into the heart of the Carthaginian empire. The first encounter of the two fleets at Mylae off the coast of Sicily in 260 was a Roman victory, the *corvus* coming as a complete surprise to the overconfident Carthaginians. It was followed by an even more crushing success off Cape Ecnomus (on the southern coast of Sicily) in 256 when eighty Carthaginian ships were sunk or captured. In each case the *corvus* gave the Romans the advantage. So long as the Romans avoided being rammed as the ships closed they could get troops on to an enemy deck and capture it. The way was now open for an invasion of Africa. Despite having to maintain supply lines over 600 kilometres of sea, Roman troops were landed there in 256 and at first moved successfully towards Carthage. However, the Carthaginians imported a Spartan mercenary, Xanthippus, to train their army and, using their cavalry to surround the Roman infantry, destroyed the Roman invaders in 255. Further disasters struck Rome when a fleet sent to rescue the survivors was destroyed in a storm and many thousands of trained oarsmen drowned. The year 249 was again disastrous for Rome with a major defeat at the Battle of Drepana off the west coast of Sicily and the loss of almost all the remaining fleet in a storm later in the year.

The war now became one of attrition, symbolized by a nine-year siege by the Romans of the Carthaginian fortress of Lilybaeum on the west coast of Sicily. Carthaginian resources began to run low, as coins of increasingly debased silver show, while the Romans continued to draw on the immense wealth of Syracuse. Yet the attacking Roman forces were harassed by the only outstanding commander of the war, the Carthaginian Hamilcar, who successfully tied them to their bases. By 242, Rome seemed exhausted but a final effort was made to raise a new fleet from the contributions of private citizens. At a battle off the Aegades Islands in March of the following year the Romans met what was also the last of the Carthaginian forces, a fleet heavily laden with supplies for Sicily but whose crews were poorly trained. A great Roman victory in which most of the Carthaginian ships were sunk or captured finally decided the outcome of the war. (Among the most exciting finds in the past ten years are *rostra*, the bronze rams, from sunk ships that have been dredged from the site of the battle.) Carthage could no longer protect Sicily and in the peace that followed Carthage ceded Sicily to Rome. Syracuse survived as an independent ally of Rome.

The Beginnings of Provincial Administration

The victory confirmed Rome as an extraordinarily resilient and determined power, now with a foothold outside Italy and a fast maturing naval tradition. Within three

years Rome had taken advantage of a mutiny among Carthaginian mercenaries to seize Sardinia and Corsica from the Carthaginians. This was seen, even by many Romans, as unjustified, but the opportunism of an ever more confident and expansionist state now prevailed. The possession of overseas territories presented Rome with a new challenge. Her first concern may have been to protect them against a Carthaginian counter-attack, and troops were probably left on each island for this purpose. At some point Rome must also have become aware that there were local systems of taxation, in Sicily at least, whose fruits could be diverted to Rome. The form of the earliest administration is unknown, but from 227 the number of praetors elected annually in Rome was increased to four and two of these were selected as governors, one in Sicily and the other in Sardinia and Corsica. It was already the custom when magistrates were sent out of Roman territory for the senate to assign them a *provincia*, a defined responsibility (the pacification of a tribe, for instance). A magistrate sent overseas was similarly given a defined *provincia*, perhaps the collection of tribute or the defence of the area. Gradually the word *provincia* came to refer to a specific territory rather than just the task the magistrate was expected to achieve within that territory and so the English 'province' and 'provincial' (although the earlier sense of the word can still be found in English).

The Second Punic War

In 225 BC central Italy was faced with an invasion of Celtic war-bands. The Romans crushed them at the Battle of Telemon and exploited their advantage by conquering the Po valley and establishing Roman colonies at Cremona and Placentia (218). Roman control of the valley was still precarious, however, as was seen in 218 when Italy was unexpectedly invaded from the north by a Carthaginian army led by Hannibal, the son of Hamilcar.

In the years after their defeat the Carthaginians under Hamilcar had been energetically building a new empire in Spain, whether as a replacement for their lost territories or to gather resources for a new war is not clear. One of Rome's oldest allies, the city of Massilia, had clearly become concerned about the expansion. Rome needed her support against the Celts and it was probably for this reason she made an agreement with the Carthaginians that they would not move north of the river Ebro. During these years, however, Rome also made an alliance with the town of Saguntum, well south of the Ebro, evidence that she was concerned about Carthaginian resurgence. When Hannibal, who had succeeded his father, besieged and took the city in 219, probably in the belief that Rome had given him a free hand as far as the Ebro, Rome quickly protested. Neither side appears to have had any inhibitions about going to war again and the Second Punic War (218–202) was the result.

Rome's first plans were ambitious, to go on the offensive and fight the war in both Spain and Africa. An army and fleet under Publius Cornelius Scipio, the consul for the year, was sent round the coast to the north of Spain with the aim of defeating

Hannibal there. Hannibal, however, had also decided that his best strategy was an offensive one, to strike at Italy, in the hope of humiliating Rome and destroying her links with her allies. As his army made its way eastwards, crossing first the Pyrenees and then moving towards the Alps, it just evaded the Romans crossing in the opposite direction. Scipio, however, made the courageous decision to send the army on to Spain under his brother Gnaeus and to return himself to meet Hannibal in northern Italy.

Hannibal was one of those men who seem groomed for greatness. His father had been a brilliant and energetic commander and also a statesman of vision who had reformed Carthage's institutions and showed himself a patron of Greek culture. Hannibal had, in fact, a tutor from Sparta and was brought up, as was anyone with military pretensions in the ancient world, to admire the campaigns of Alexander. However, when he trained his army, like all Carthaginian armies one made up of mercenaries, he dropped the standard Greek phalanx of heavily armed infantry and created an army of smaller, more flexible units, each based on an ethnic group. It was this, an energetic cavalry, and Hannibal's tactical genius which were to underlie his success. (On this war see Robert O'Connell, *The Ghosts of Cannae: Hannibal and the Darkest Hour of the Roman Republic*, London and New York, 2010.)

It is still not known where Hannibal crossed the Alps. The Col de Clavier is a recent choice of scholars. It was a gruelling ordeal with hostile tribes harassing his men (and the elephants they brought with them) as they slithered down icy precipices. Perhaps a third of his army was lost on the way, with some 25,000 men finally descending on the Po plain, where the Celts rallied to Hannibal as their liberator. In the first major encounter with the Romans at Trebia, west of the new Roman colony at Placentia, over half the Roman army was lost and with it the north of Italy. The next year, 217, Hannibal, now in central Italy, lured a large Roman army into the narrow plain between Lake Trasimene and the mountains and then slaughtered it. A consul, Gaius Flaminius, and perhaps 15,000 men died in the disaster. The only consolation for Rome was that her allied cities of central Italy, those of Latium, Umbria, and Etruria, stood firm. Their traditional fears of the Celts and the belief that the fiery mercenaries of Hannibal were little more than barbarians kept them loyal.

In an emergency such as this the constitution allowed a dictator to be appointed for a limited, six-month, term of office. Quintus Fabius Maximus was chosen and he argued that the only policy was to avoid the fixed battles of which Hannibal was clearly the master and instead wear him down gradually (through what became known as Fabian tactics). A policy of avoiding battle was so alien to Roman thinking that at first Fabius had little support and when, in 216, after his term of office was over, two new consuls were appointed to replace him they resumed the traditional policy of direct confrontation. According to one source, the senate raised eight legions each of 5,000 men and, together with allies, 80,000 men marched south to Apulia where Hannibal was ravaging the land. Hannibal drew the Roman armies on to an open plain at Cannae where he knew he could use his cavalry effectively. The Romans hoped that the sheer weight of their numbers would be

enough and drew their infantry together in a close formation so that it could overwhelm the Celts and Spaniards who were holding Hannibal's centre. However, although the Carthaginian centre retreated it did not break, and the Romans found themselves enveloped by African infantry stationed on the two wings and the Carthaginian cavalry who had routed their Roman counterparts. In a devastating defeat all but 14,500 of the Roman army was wiped out.

His victory at Cannae now allowed Hannibal to consolidate his position in southern Italy. His greatest prize was Capua, the second city of Italy, and a number of other cities of Campania either came over to him or were captured in the aftermath of the battle. Hannibal was now in a position to march on Rome but he never made the move. He must have realized that the subjection of the city would be a very different matter from defeating its forces in the open field and there is no evidence he wished to destroy Rome. He appears to have stuck to his original aim of humiliating her and scattering her allies, probably in the hope that she would be forced to surrender Sicily and Sardinia and be reduced to her original territory in Latium.

In Rome the news of the catastrophe shocked the city. It was hard to escape the feeling that the gods had deserted Rome. Even the oracle at Delphi was consulted as to the correct procedure for regaining their trust, and there was a ritual sacrifice of appeasement in which a pair of Gauls and a pair of Greeks were buried alive in the Forum. Yet Rome's nerve held. The historian Polybius later picked this moment as the one in Rome's history when her resolution was at its strongest. Hannibal had sent to ransom his prisoners, but the senate refused to make any concessions, to the despair of the prisoners' families. Instead four new legions were raised from the city's youth and 8,000 slaves were freed for service. The policy of Fabius (who was to serve as consul twice in the years immediately following Cannae and again in 209) now became predominant as the Romans counted their advantages. Whatever the losses in the south, the centre of Italy with all its manpower remained loyal and the Roman armies could be rebuilt. Most significantly Hannibal held no major ports. He captured the town of Tarentum in 212 but the Romans managed to hang on to its citadel and with it control over its important harbour until Fabius recaptured and sacked the rest of the city in 209. In 212 Capua had also come under siege and the following year Hannibal marched on Rome in the hope of forcing the Roman armies to raise the siege. When he saw how confidently the city was defended he retreated and Capua fell. Hannibal was now on the defensive and it was significant that each winter he was now forced to withdraw to the south of Italy. In a final attempt to break the deadlock Hannibal's brother Hasdrubal marched from Spain to join his brother but he was intercepted in the north of Italy by both consuls and defeated at the Battle of the river Metaurus in 207. This was the last major engagement of the war on Italian soil. It left Hannibal unable to break out of southern Italy.

Meanwhile, the most significant fighting of the war was taking place in Spain. It was difficult country for both Romans and Carthaginians not only because of the terrain but because the local tribes were hostile to outsiders (the Carthaginians had treated them particularly badly) and unrest was common. The Romans enjoyed an

unbroken run of successes until in 211 three separate Carthaginian armies converged on their forces, which had been split into two under Gnaeus Scipio and his brother Publius (sent by the senate to join Gnaeus in 217). At the ensuing defeat, which saw the deaths of both Scipios, the Romans almost lost their hold on Spain. The situation was saved when Publius Cornelius Scipio, the son of Publius, was appointed to take command. It was a major break with precedent as he had not yet held either a consulship or praetorship.

Scipio was perhaps the most brilliant Roman commander to date, energetic, charismatic, and imaginative. In 209 he achieved the capture of New Carthage, a supply base of immense strategic importance, by launching a surprise attack across a lagoon at low water. (His claim that Neptune, the god of the sea, had promised him success in a dream led to rumours that he was divinely inspired.) A decisive victory at Ilipa in 206 and the surrender of another strategically important port, Gades, saw the end of Carthaginian dominance in Spain and the beginning of centuries of Roman hegemony in the peninsula. Scipio had himself hailed as *imperator*, a title of honour offered by troops immediately after a victory. He had now gained the status with which to return to Rome and be elected consul in 205, despite the fact that he had never been praetor, a normal precondition for election.

Scipio now argued that he should take the war to Africa. There were those who opposed him, worried over the growth of his personal power and concerned that Hannibal, still at large in Italy, should be defeated first. However, Scipio set off for Africa in 204 and it was his first success there that forced the Carthaginians to recall Hannibal (who had not been 'home' since 237 when he was a child of 9). The final showdown between the two commanders came at the Battle of Zama (202). For the first time the Roman cavalry played a major part in a victory. Scipio's horsemen drove the Carthaginian cavalry off the field and the Roman infantry was able to hold the Carthaginian lines until the Roman cavalry returned from the chase to attack them from behind. Hannibal's army was destroyed and the war was effectively at an end.

In the settlement, Carthage was reduced to her territory in Africa, from which she was forbidden to expand, and she was burdened with an indemnity of 10,000 talents to be paid over fifty years. Rome inherited her empire in Spain. In Sicily, Syracuse, which had joined the Carthaginians, had been taken and sacked by Romans in 212. The most notable casualty was the celebrated scientist Archimedes, whose ingenious war machines had delayed the city's capture. Scipio himself was awarded the name 'Africanus' in recognition of his victory.

The Pacification of Spain and Northern Italy

Italy had been devastated by the sixteen years of Hannibal's occupation, and one of the legacies of the Second Punic War was a lasting fear of invaders from the north. However, victory had been won and much of the credit was due to the senate, whose resolve had proved unshakeable. The next fifty years saw its greatest prestige.

Moreover, there had been no concessions made to any of Rome's allies and Rome went on to deal ruthlessly with cities that had defected. Capua was treated with especial fury. The city ceased to be a *municipium* and all its land was declared Roman property. The forcible removal of much of the population of Campania was also ordered, though it is probable that this was never fully carried out. Meanwhile in the north of Italy the Celts were marked out for final subjection. From 201 to 190 the senate assigned one or both consuls to the north, and the two main Celtic tribes, the Boii and Insubres, were dealt with ruthlessly. The Insubres submitted and they survived. The Boii resisted. The richest part of their land was confiscated and their presence so effectively eliminated that there is virtually no archaeological evidence for La Tène culture in north-western Italy after this period. Roman settlers were moved in to take their place. In the north-west, another tribe, the Ligurians, were also conquered so that by 180 BC northern Italy was finally under Roman control. The area would be naturally prosperous and one colony, Aquileia, founded in 181 BC, was to become one of the wealthiest cities of the empire. A plaque recording the digging of the furrow of the first settlement still survives (in the museum there).

Control had also to be consolidated over Spain. After 197 two further praetors were appointed each year and Spain divided into two *provinciae*, Hispania Citerior, Nearer Spain, along the eastern coast, and Hispania Ulterior, Further Spain, stretching inland from the southern coast. At first the situation in Spain seemed so calm that the two legions stationed there were withdrawn to Rome. It was a serious miscalculation. Very soon the tribes had risen in revolt and for the next twenty years there were continual wars of pacification in Spain before Roman control was established well into the interior. The Roman commitment was not enormous. Spain was clearly not seen to be as important as Italy or, later, Greece. In most years four legions were deployed there, about 22,000 men, with an equal number of allies. Alongside the desire to keep order a major incentive for pacification was the plunder of silver and slaves. One commander, Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus, brought back 40,000 pounds of silver with which to celebrate a triumph. The mines themselves were given to the censors to farm out to local contractors and they soon made Spain the richest source of raw materials in the empire. Even Judas Maccabaeus, the defender of Israel against the Seleucids, had heard of 'all the Romans had done in the province of Spain to gain possession of the silver and gold mines there' (1 Maccabees 8: 3).

In the 150s revolt broke out again in Spain, sparked off by an invasion of Roman territory by a still independent people, the Lusitanians. Pacification was renewed, often with great brutality, the Roman commanders taking the opportunity to raid into unconquered territory. Enslavement of whole peoples was normal and in at least one city, Cauca, surrender in 151 was followed by the massacre of the entire male population of 20,000. Yet the fighting was not easy in the mountainous country and reports that reached Italy were disquieting enough to seriously affect recruitment and dampen national morale. The final Spanish stronghold to be conquered, Numantia, only fell when the most gifted of the Roman commanders, Scipio Aemilianus, subdued it in 133 with an army expanded to 60,000 men.

He spared fifty of its inhabitants for his triumph, sold off the rest, and razed the city to the ground.

Rome Becomes Involved in Greece

While these testing campaigns were continuing Rome had also become involved in the east. In 215 Hannibal had made an alliance with Philip V of Macedon. Rome had sent a small fleet to Greece but primarily used the Aetolian League (see p. 339), traditionally hostile to Macedonia, to contain him. Peace had been made in 205 but many senators felt that Philip had not been sufficiently punished and so they responded when in 201 the king of Pergamum, Attalus, supported by Rhodes, came to Rome to appeal for help against the intrusions of Philip. There may also have been some who saw an attack on Macedonia as a chance for plunder to refill Rome's treasury, and the senate persuaded the reluctant assemblies that despite the exhaustion of the state war was justified. The official pretext for war was that Rome was protecting the liberty of the Greeks against Macedonian expansionism. Rome was aware that the Greek city-states were much more sophisticated than the tribal peoples she was subduing elsewhere and seems to have had no interest in the annexation of Greek territory. (See as an introduction Erich Gruen, 'Rome and the Greek World', in Harriet Flower (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Republic*, Cambridge and New York, 2004.)

The war was entrusted to Titus Quinctius Flamininus, a commander who had proved so effective against Hannibal that he had won a consulship for 198 when still only 30. He managed to get his command in Greece renewed for a further three years (the consuls who succeeded him were both needed in Italy and there was a trend now towards giving longer commands and greater responsibilities to individual generals), and while he was there he was in a strong position to define Roman policy on his own initiative. After destroying Philip's army at Cynoscephalae in Thessaly in 197, he used the Isthmian Games of 196 (over which he was asked to preside) to proclaim that Rome intended to leave Greece, including the coastal cities of Asia Minor, free and independent. The Greeks greeted the news with joy. It was, in fact, a shrewd move. Each city was now dependent on Rome for its protection and from this time onwards the inter-city embassies that were so much part of the Hellenistic world were directed at Rome. Flamininus himself was loaded with honours from grateful cities.

Rome now had direct links with the Greek world and regarded Greece as a sphere in which her interest, even though informal, was exclusive. It was the Seleucids who found this out to their cost. The Aetolian League had hoped to resume control over a number of cities surrendered by Philip and had sought the support of the Seleucid king Antiochus III. Antiochus had set himself the task of reviving the Seleucid kingdom and in 196 had crossed into Thrace, an area once held by the Seleucids. Roman suspicions had already been aroused and they had warned him not to come further. When, in 192, Antiochus agreed to support the Aetolian

League and crossed with a small army to the Greek mainland, the Romans reacted vigorously. In 191 at Thermopylae he was easily defeated by a Roman army twice his size. The following year he was defeated again, in Asia at Magnesia, near the old Lydian capital at Sardis.

Roman troops had now reached Asia, but while some opportunities were taken for plunder (a campaign was launched against the Galatians, who had given help to Antiochus), Rome still showed no interest in annexing territory. Again her main aim was to perpetuate her control by building up dependent allies, though her sphere of influence was now the whole Aegean area. Antiochus was excluded from the Aegean by depriving him of all his possessions along the Aegean coastline and restricting him to the east of the Taurus river. His navy was also disbanded. The cities of the coast were given their independence while the remaining territory was shared between Rhodes and the kingdom of Pergamum, which now became the largest state in Asia Minor.

So matters rested in comparative peace for twenty years, until a son of Philip of Macedon, Perseus, came to power on his father's death in 179. Perseus made tentative moves to rebuild a Macedonian relationship with Greece. While Rome was happy to leave the small Greek cities to their own devices, she could not afford to allow a rival focus of power to emerge in Greece. In 172 the Romans shipped over an army and forced Perseus into a war he had never desired. He held out successfully for some time but once again Roman manpower and resilience triumphed. In 168 Perseus' army was destroyed at the Battle of Pydna on the Macedonian coast.

It was in the settlement after Pydna that Roman power was first imposed effectively in Greece (the Romans even dedicated a monument to their victory at Delphi), and in that sense 168 marks a turning point. Macedonia was split up into four republics, each ruling itself through elected representatives and allowed only limited contact with the others. At least this was some kind of survival, with the Romans stopping short of creating directly administered provinces. Others were treated more harshly. The Molossians of Epirus who had aided Perseus found their cities plundered and, according to one source, 150,000 of their inhabitants sold into slavery. Rhodes, which had done nothing to support the Romans in the war, was undermined by the creation by the Romans of a free port of Delos, which took much of its trade and developed into one of the major slave-trading markets of the ancient world, capable of handling 10,000 transactions a day. The Seleucid king Antiochus IV, who had invaded Egypt in 168 without Roman approval, suddenly found himself confronted on the spot by a Roman envoy, Gaius Popillius Laenas, who drew a circle around the astonished monarch and forbade him to leave it until he had agreed to make peace and withdraw. He acquiesced. Other kings allowed even greater humiliation to take place. Polybius talks of Prusias II of Bithynia, who visited Rome in 166 and threw himself before the senators addressing them as "Saviour Gods!"; thus making it impossible, Polybius goes on, 'for anyone after him to surpass him in unmanliness, effeminacy and servility', while Eumenes, king of Pergamum, who had been a staunch ally of Rome until 168, was humiliated in his own country by a Roman commissioner who encouraged his subjects to publicly vilify him.

The final subjection of Greece was not far off. In 150 a revolt in Macedonia was met with the reduction of the kingdom of Philip II and Alexander into a Roman province (148). The Achaean League had also aroused increasing irritation in Rome. The League had been involved in a dispute with Sparta, whose independence had been upheld by Rome. Rome also insisted that other cities, including Corinth and Argos, be allowed to leave the League if they wished. The League realized its survival was at stake and it must make its final stand. Its hopes were quickly dashed by Lucius Mummius, consul for 146, who defeated the League's forces. In an echo of Alexander's treatment of Thebes 200 years earlier, the senate singled out one of its cities, Corinth, for centuries one of the major trading ports of the Aegean, for such complete destruction that the site remained deserted for a hundred years.

The same fate had already overtaken Carthage. The loss of the city's territorial empire in 202 had not meant the end of its prosperity and its trade routes still stretched as far as the Red and the Black Sea. Evidence from excavations shows that the city may even have grown during the second century, and a population of 200,000–300,000 has been guessed at. Militarily, however, the city was weak, its men totally inexperienced in war after the peace enforced on the city by Rome fifty years before. When a Carthaginian army was mustered against the neighbouring king Massinissa of Numidia in 150 it was annihilated.

The very fact that Carthage had raised an army was now to be used by Rome as an excuse for declaring war, even though Rome's consistent support of Massinissa against Carthage had contributed to the Carthaginian attack. There was no strategic need for such a war and it may simply have been that Roman hard-liners in the senate refused to countenance the continued existence of an old and still prosperous rival. After three years of siege, Carthage was finally stormed, appropriately by Scipio Aemilianus, the grandson by adoption of Scipio Africanus. The city was razed to the ground, at least 50,000 of its inhabitants sold into slavery, and its land ritually cursed, as well as contaminated with salt, to stifle any rebirth. For many Romans, however, this was a less than honourable war, and even Scipio was said to have had a premonition that the terrible fate of Carthage would one day be followed by a similar one for Rome. Carthage's territory became the new province of Africa.

Within a few years, therefore, the balance of power in the Mediterranean had been transformed with both the Carthaginian empire and the Hellenistic monarchs humbled. The Romans held *provinciae* in Spain, Africa, and Greece. In 133 the last king of Pergamum bequeathed his kingdom to Rome and it became the province of Asia. The sacking of two great trading cities of the ancient world confirmed that Rome's imperialism had moved into a new, more arrogant, phase.

Polybius and *The Universal History*

One contemporary of the events, the Greek historian Polybius (c.200–after 118 BC), was so impressed by the triumph of Rome that he set out in his *Universal History*, the only example of Hellenistic history to survive, to explain how it had happened.

Polybius was a talented young aristocrat from Megalopolis, one of the members of the Achaean League. He had become a leader of the League's cavalry by 170, but after Pydna he was one of a thousand nobles from the League taken as hostages to Italy. Rather than brood in exile, as many of his fellow hostages did in remote cities of Etruria, Polybius managed to get to Rome and become friendly with Scipio Aemilianus (later the victor over Carthage and Numantia). He soon had access to the leading families of the city while also managing to keep his contacts with Greece.

Polybius was also a man of action. During his exile he travelled widely, across Italy, Africa, Spain, Gaul, and through the Straits of Gibraltar. He was with Scipio at the destruction of Carthage. He had been allowed to return to Greece in 150, and after the humiliation of the Achaean League by Rome in 146 he was appointed to mastermind the settlement of their affairs that followed. He did this so successfully that he was honoured in many of the League's cities and an inscription in Megalopolis pays tribute to the way he quenched the anger of the Romans. He was extraordinarily well placed to write the history of the Roman conquest of Greece, though he extended his history to take in the two Punic Wars as well.

It was the seriousness with which Polybius took his task that marks him out as one of the greater Greek historians. He had no doubt that the Romans deserved to defeat the Greeks, though one must remember that his sources were heavily biased towards his aristocratic Roman friends. The highly disciplined Roman armies, their resolute spirit, and, above all, the city's balanced constitution gave them an overwhelming superiority. In that sense, the Roman victories were comprehensible. However, at the same time, Polybius recognized that chance, Tyche, always played a role in the unfolding of the events, and he sought to establish, through a careful analysis of events, how far chance had contributed to the Roman victory. Polybius was scrupulous in his search for the truth and appears to have been an avid interviewer of those who had witnessed the events of the past.

Motives for War and Imperialism

Polybius had attempted to explain why Rome had been so successful in war. It is perhaps more difficult to explain what her motives were for engaging in so many wars in the first place. A traditional view has seen Rome primarily as a defensive power, reacting to events rather than creating them. According to this view the Carthaginians, Philip of Macedon, the invading Celts, were all threatening forces to which Rome had to respond as she had had to respond early in her history to those who had threatened her on the exposed plain of Latium. This view was challenged by William Harris in his book *War and Imperialism in Republican Rome* (Oxford, 1979), in which Harris argued that Roman society was naturally attuned to aggression. For the aristocratic elite war provided the main avenue to political success, the only way an individual could achieve glory and status, while the fruits of victory, in plunder and slaves, made war attractive for the luxurious lifestyle and status it

brought. In Italy the confiscation of land allowed the surplus population of Rome to be settled away from the city so that social tensions could be contained. Insofar as the only obligation that Rome expected from her allies was the provision of men for war, her continuing supremacy over them also depended on frequent campaigns. A number of forces, economic, social, and political, thus combined to create an active will for war and this explains why Rome was seldom at peace.

Rome was certainly a militaristic state. She had access to large forces, showed no inhibitions about using them, and once she was engaged in a war fought it through to a conclusion, normally in her favour. As moments in the Punic Wars showed, surrender was never a considered alternative. It does not follow, however, that, because Rome had an unrivalled mechanism for winning wars and a range of incentives for doing so, every war she engaged in was of her seeking. The events described above show a rather more complex pattern. Once Rome had stumbled into war with Carthage she was tied to winning the war or risking humiliation. After the First Punic War she knew that Carthaginian revenge was possible and she took active steps against it. Her consolidation of control in the western Mediterranean can be seen, in this sense, as defensive.

It is also true, however, that Rome showed an abnormal sensitivity to any slight or any perceived threat to an area she had defined as a sphere of interest and was quick to use war in retaliation. This is how she became embroiled in Greece. How much the desire for individual glory and plunder was an element in her reaction is difficult to gauge. Victory was certainly enjoyed to the full by those who had achieved it, but there is little evidence that Rome set out to acquire permanent control of territory overseas. The empire appears to have grown piecemeal, with marked reluctance in Greece at least to annex territory until there was no alternative way of maintaining Rome's supremacy in the area.

Between 148 and 133, a more deliberate policy of humiliation of enemies and determined annexation of further territory can be seen. This was when Macedonia and Greece were absorbed, Carthage sacked, and the wealthy kingdom of Pergamum inherited. By now Rome had a Mediterranean-wide empire that she had to defend and administer and an ideology that, for the next 250 years, appeared to set no limits to its size. This, however, was still an immature enterprise. Often the status of the conquered was never fully resolved and the degree of independence they could enjoy after defeat never clarified. Boundaries were seldom clearly defined while unconquered peoples remained active on the edges of an empire that still had no effective administration for much of its territories. The very size of the conquered areas meant that the nature of military command was transformed as legions had to be diverted to meet different challenges and commanders kept on year after year in remote areas for fear of losing the summer's gains. So often in the history of the Ancient Near East (see my Chapters 2 and 6) an empire had risen quickly but then collapsed a few decades later. Would Rome be the same? (See further the thoughtful analysis by Arthur Eckstein, 'Conceptualising Roman Imperial Expansion under the Republic: An Introduction', in N. Rosenstein and R. Morstein Marx (eds.), *A Companion to the Roman Republic*, Oxford, 2006.)

The Impact of the East

The impact of Rome's victories at home was, however, dramatic. Not only did vast amounts of plunder, including some hundreds of thousands of slaves, pour into Italy but the city was open now to the rich cultures of the east. Rome had always been part of a cultural matrix that included access to Greek culture either through the mediation of the Etruscans or directly via the Greek cities of southern Italy that had now been absorbed. It was the fall of Syracuse in 212 that saw the first major influx of Greek art to Rome. The historian Plutarch exaggerates when he writes, 'Prior to this, Rome neither had nor even knew of these exquisite and refined things... rather it was full of barbaric weapons and bloody spoils,' but the triumphant processions of booty had an overwhelming impact and clearly marked a new phase in the relationship with Greece and her culture. The eastern wars brought the first treasures from mainland Greece, engraved plate and inlaid furniture, music girls, and the conception that cooking was an art. The victor of Pydna, Aemilius Paullus, carried off the royal library of Macedonia as a gift for his sons. He brought back so many statues and paintings that they took three days to pass in his triumphal procession.

The impact was soon felt in Rome itself. A portico set up by Quintus Metellus, the destroyer of Macedonia, in 148, was the first permanent Greek building in the city. Soon Greek artists were copying Hellenistic statues for Roman patrons. Within Rome marble replaced tufa blocks and fine metals terracotta statues. The earliest Roman temple in marble was put up in the 140s and although the Etruscan model of a high podium and decorated façade was retained the decoration was now in Greek and the Greek architectural orders became common. The sack of Corinth resulted in a flood of bronze decorative objects into Rome that became favourite collectors' pieces. In the second century Rome was transformed with three new aqueducts, a mass of new temples, and, for the first time, grand houses for the nobility. One vast warehouse, the Porticus Aemilia, on the left bank of the Tiber, south of the Aventine, was 487 metres long and 60 metres wide with 294 pillars. The 'Aemilia' records the patronage of the military family who restored it over generations, thus showing another way in which a noble family could keep its name before the public. (It could only have been constructed with the help of a Roman invention, *opus caementicium*, a mortar of lime and sand strengthened by stones, that appears for the first time about 200 BC.)

Greek culture infiltrated Roman at many levels. Athletic games following a Greek model were staged for the first time in Rome in 186 by Scipio Africanus' brother, the victor over Antiochus. Greek drama was introduced by Livius Andronicus at the end of the third century. The Greek elites of Sicily and southern Italy were avid theatre-goers. Livius was born Greek and had probably been brought to Rome as a boy after the sack of Tarentum in 272. The most lively adaptations were those of Plautus (c.250–184 BC), who translated a mass of Hellenistic plays into a series of fast-moving musical comedies, full of stock characters, thwarted lovers, swaggering soldiers, and slaves with more wits than their masters.

The greatest poet of the period, Quintus Ennius (239–169 BC), who was trilingual in Oscan, Greek, and Latin, introduced the Greek epic into Roman literature in his celebrated *Annales*, a verse history of Rome. Its sombre tone caught the mood of the educated classes and it became a standard text from which Roman schoolboys learnt of the exploits of their ancestors. Later Terence (c.193–159 BC) followed Plautus in adapting Greek comedies for the Roman stage, although he kept more closely to the originals and was altogether more highbrow than Plautus.

By the middle of the second century BC, therefore, the average upper-class Roman knew a great deal about the Greek way of life and would have met Greeks in a variety of contexts. Individual Romans adopted Greek ways with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Many remained very conscious of a traditional system of Roman values that was under threat, values that were rooted in a dimly remembered past where the typical citizen lived a frugal life on a small-holding. (The archetypal and probably mythical hero was Cincinnatus, who became dictator for sixteen days during the fifth-century wars with the Aequi, returning to his plot of land as soon as the state had been saved.) In war the Roman would show *virtus*, unflinching courage, at home he would be marked out by his *pietas*, correct observance of the religious rituals by which the protection of his home and the state would be assured. To his clients he would be known for his *fides*, good faith, and he would never be corrupted by bribes. These virtues would combine to make up his *dignitas*, his status, and they would achieve their greatest value in public service. The funerals of great men were used as a means of inspiring the next generation with the ideals of the past, often with the son extolling the virtues of his deceased father. ‘He achieved the ten greatest and best things which wise men spend their whole lives seeking,’ proclaimed Quintus Caecilius of his father Lucius, the *pontifex maximus*, on his death in 221 BC:

He wished to be the first of warriors, the best of orators, and the most valiant of commanders; to be in charge of the greatest affairs and held in the highest honour; to possess supreme wisdom and to be regarded as supreme within the senate; to come to great wealth by honourable means; to leave many children; and to be the most distinguished person in the state.

Many feared that these values were threatened by the influx of Greek culture. Plutarch blamed Marcellus, the victor of Syracuse, for ‘filling the Roman people, who had hitherto been accustomed to fighting or farming... with a life of softness and ease... with a taste for leisure and idle talk, affecting urbane opinions about the arts and about artists, even to wasting the better part of a day on such things.’ A famous passage from Polybius chronicles the supposed decay:

Some young men squandered their energies on love affairs with boys, others with courtesans, and others again with musical entertainments and bequests and the extravagant expenses that go with them, for in the course of the war with Perseus and the Macedonians they had quickly acquired the luxurious habits of the Greeks in this direction. So far had the taste for dissipation and debauchery spread among young men that many of them were ready to pay a talent for a male prostitute and 300 drachmae for a jar of Pontic pickled fish. (Translation: Ian Scott-Kilvert)

There were fears that physical hardiness would be undermined by these activities, that a weakness for wealth would lead to corruption, and that family fortunes would be wastefully squandered. In retaliation a number of laws curbed spending at banquets, while in a famous case in the 150s the seats of a theatre were destroyed on the insistence of a conservative senator who believed standing was more manly. (Rome was not to have a stone theatre until Pompey constructed one a hundred years later and even then he had to conceal it as a temple with a semicircle of steps below it.) A group of philosophers from Athens who arrived in 155 (Carneades the Sceptic was among them, see earlier, p. 353) were ridiculed when it appeared that philosophical arguments could be applied to destroy any justification for the Roman empire. Earlier, in 186, there had been a witch-hunt against the participants in Bacchanalian orgies, the Roman equivalents of the riotous celebrations in honour of Dionysus.

The Older Cato

The opposition to the trends was spearheaded by one of the most interesting and complex figures of the period, Marcus Porcius Cato (234–149 BC). Cato was a native of Tusculum, a small town near Rome, who through the help of a noble patron and his own considerable ability was able to win a consulship in 195 BC. His command for the year was in Spain and here he excelled himself, returning to Rome to celebrate a triumph. He was later sent to Greece with the Roman army that defeated Antiochus at Thermopylae. As a respected former consul he was elected in 184 to the prestigious post of censor and he revived the traditional role of the office as a guardian of public morals. For the next thirty-five years he stood out as the figure-head of resistance to the influx of ideas from Greece and to luxurious living and corruption. In his later years he became increasingly obsessed with the continuing survival of Carthage and it was his often-repeated pronouncement ‘Carthage must be destroyed’ which helped create the atmosphere that led to the city’s final destruction. Cato wrote the first history of Rome in Latin and the earliest surviving treatise on agriculture, *De Agricultura*, which despite its idealization of the rural past of Rome was supportive of the new commercial farming. His narrowness and vindictiveness on public occasions was offset to some extent by a real affection for his son, for whom he composed a history of Rome written out in large letters for easy reading and whose bath-time he never missed.

Yet Cato was not simply a narrow-minded Roman traditionalist. He had at least been to Greece even if only as a soldier. Although he showed no deep understanding of Greek culture there are hints in his writings that he had read Homer, Demosthenes, and Xenophon. When he contributed to the building of Rome it was with a basilica, the all-purpose assembly hall used for law cases, commercial dealings, and markets which was derived from the Greek stoa. Probably it was not so much Greece itself that he feared as the loss of self-control by those who took on Greek ways.

In his *Culture and National Identity in Republican Rome* (Ithaca, NY, 1992), Eric Gruen provides a balanced assessment of the relationship between Greek and Roman

in which he stresses how often the Romans used Greek culture to sustain their own cultural identity. Greek statues were often rededicated in Roman temples, for instance. It was the maintenance of the dignity of the Roman elite and of good public order that seems to have been behind the rejection of specific Greek customs, such as exercising naked. The same could be said of the suppression of the Bacchanalian cults in 186 BC. Their Greek origins did not offend, it was rather their frenzied music, abandoned dancing, and promiscuous mixing of men and women that challenged conventional notions of authority and threatened state control of religious affairs. So here we have an ambiguity, a conquered people who were in turn despised for their 'softness' but admired for their intellectual achievement. One way of coping with this was to suggest there was a distinction between the austere minds and frugal people of Attica and the sensuous Greeks of Asia who were much more corrupting!

The Great Period of Senatorial Government

The stability of the state over which Cato remained so concerned was, however, little threatened during his lifetime. In the fifty years after the Second Punic War the senate proved remarkably successful in maintaining collective oligarchical rule. The careers of Scipio Africanus and Flamininus had shown that an individual commander away from Rome could achieve a position of immense influence. Both had come close to being treated as kings in Spain and Greece. After the Second Punic War, the lure of plunder and glory led to increasing competition for the magistracies that could provide them. However, the senate successfully contained these ambitions. A law of 180 prescribed minimum ages for the praetors and consuls and there had to be an interval of at least two years between holding these posts. In the 150s second consulships were forbidden. Commanders might celebrate their triumphs and flaunt their plunder; they could not, however, translate them into long-term political power.

Although the senate retained enormous prestige in these years there is also evidence that the popular assemblies were vigorously involved in politics. There may have been 250,000 citizens by now and only a tiny proportion could have attended meetings, but the assemblies took their powers of election and legislation seriously. They also sat in judgement in the private prosecutions that became increasingly prevalent in this period. Accusations that a commander had taken plunder which was not his due, or extorted excessive tribute, were an accepted part of the political infighting that took place among rival candidates for power. However brutal the reality of conquest, some ideals of 'correct behaviour' survived.

Intimations of Popular Unrest

After 150, however, the prestige of the senate was in decline and the body seemed less able to control ambitious individuals. When the war against Carthage became

stalemated in 148 Scipio Aemilianus, whose early career in Spain and Africa had been brilliant, won a consulship and the command on the behest of a tribune, who threatened to use a veto to block the consular elections if Scipio did not get the command. Scipio was under age and had never been praetor but the senate was unable to block the appointment. In 142 Scipio became a censor, seeing off a rival candidate whom the senate supported. It was said that he was surrounded by excited crowds who clamoured for his appointment. In 134 he gained a second consulship, again through popular support, in order to finish off the Spanish war at a time when second consulships were forbidden by law. In 143 Appius Claudius Pulcher celebrated a triumph even though the senate had refused him one.

These developments probably reflected growing popular unrest. The long wars in Spain, where soldiers served for an average of six years, were increasingly unpopular (hence the desire to appoint commanders to finish the job even when they were technically not qualified to take command). Recruitment was faltering and there was growing tension between the consuls, whose interest was in raising large armies, and the tribunes who, in their role of representatives of the people, resisted new levies of citizens. The cockpit of politics remained a small area in the centre of Rome and popular involvement, even if only in crowds who shouted their approval or disapproval of speakers, was a constant backdrop to unfolding events.

It used to be believed that these tensions were intensified in the second century by changing patterns in agriculture, notably the emergence of large commercial ranches, the *latifundia*, and the increased use of slaves. It was argued that this was followed by a corresponding decline in smaller peasant landholdings, leading to the distress of the dispossessed. The sources, however, are difficult to interpret. There are the census returns (of male citizens) that can be used to estimate the population of Italy, and its growth or decline. Literary sources, such as Cato's treatise on agriculture, provide some limited evidence and this has been enlarged by field-walking which attempts to trace changing patterns of rural settlement. However, the sheer diversity of Italy's geography, between mountain communities and those on the plains, and between Romanized and native peoples, make generalizations from these combined sources impossible. We now know that the buying up of land by the elite had begun much earlier than the second century so that this was not a new, sudden phenomenon. Moreover these wealthy landowners preferred to own a number of medium size, rather than enormous, estates. Their economies were a mix of cereals, vines, olives, and stock with orchards providing a variety of fruit. This was not ruthless commercialization, even though expanding trade, which provided further opportunities for classes below the senatorial families, who disdained such things, brought new export markets, especially for wine from Campania. (The growth of trade can be noted in simple changes such as making *amphorae* more robust so that they can be shipped more easily over long distances.) Earlier estimates that the countryside may have been flooded with slaves (as many as 2 million in one case) are now being revised downwards—there is simply not the evidence to show a slave economy, although most farms did employ slaves alongside free casual labour and tenants. (See Nathan Rosenstein, *Rome at War: Farms, Families, and*

Death in the Middle Republic, Chapel Hill, NC, 2004, for a recent assessment of this difficult area.)

The view now, therefore, is that land hunger was not primarily caused by the smaller landholder being dispossessed from his land by commercial pressures. An increase in rural population may have been just as important as a cause of land shortages. Disruption was certainly more abrupt during the wars and confiscations of the first century BC (see Chapters 23–4) than it was in the second century. The ‘pull’ factor of the enormous growth of Rome now seems as significant as ‘push’ factors in the countryside with the poor naturally attracted by economic opportunities of city life. One estimate is that a population of 200,000 in Rome in the early second century reached one million by the time of Augustus two centuries later. This is where there was a new tension. There were hurried attempts to improve the water supply of the city in 144 and a crisis in the corn supply in 138. Evidence for actual unrest is limited but it was in these years that the tribunes appear to have become more active on behalf of the citizenry, as has already been seen in relation to military recruitment. In 139 a tribune managed to get a law passed introducing a secret ballot for the annual election of magistrates, the first of several ballot laws. In 133 this revival of tribunate confidence was to drive the Republic into political crisis.

Note: The introduction of Roman coinage

The earliest unit of coinage was the *as*, issued as a pound (324 grams) of bronze in the early third century BC. This was 300 years after coins had first been used in Greece and Rome’s minting of coin might be seen as part of its adoption of Greek culture. Not long afterwards the first silver coins appeared and about 214 the two metals were given an equivalent by setting a silver *denarius* as equal to ten *asses*. The *as* was gradually reduced in weight until it was the equivalent of 54 grams in bronze. The *denarius* was also revalued (in 141 BC) so as to be equal to sixteen *asses*. As the *as* became less valuable a new coin, the *sestertius*, 2.5 *asses*, was minted and this in its turn was later revalued to four *asses*. The *sestertius* was used freely as a measure of wealth or an annual payment, such as a soldier’s salary. With the Romans absorbing so much silver from booty and mines in Macedonia, production of the *denarius* soared. By the middle of the second century BC Rome was minting as many *denarii* in a year as some Greek cities would in a century and the silver *denarius* became the standard coin of the Mediterranean world until the third century AD. (See the entry ‘Roman coinage’ in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, revised 3rd edition, Oxford, 2003, for further details as well as Christopher Howgego, *Ancient History from Coins*, London and New York, 1995 for more general background.)

The Gracchi and the Challenge to Senatorial Government

(Two ‘companion’ volumes for this period are Nathan Rosenstein and Robert Morstein-Marx, *A Companion to the Roman Republic*, Oxford, 2006, which has probably more in-depth information and range than the reliable Harriet Flower, *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Republic*, Cambridge and New York, 2004. A succinct overview is Mary Beard and Michael Crawford, *Rome in the Late Republic*, London, 2000.)

Social reformers were rare in Roman politics and this makes the attempts by two brothers, Tiberius and Gaius Sempronius Gracchus, to tackle the social and economic problems in Italy in the late second century BC all the more remarkable. The Gracchi were a noble family, with five consulships to their credit, and Tiberius and Gaius’ mother, Cornelia, was none other than the daughter of Scipio Africanus. She was a formidable woman, mother of twelve children, of whom only three survived. When widowed, she transferred her ambitions onto her sons and the result was two men, nine years apart in age, who were the nearest republican Rome ever produced to Greek reformers such as Solon and Cleisthenes.

Tiberius Gracchus was elected a tribune in December 134. The flexibility of the constitution was such that his nobility was no bar to the office. The traditional powers of his post allowed him not only to pass laws through the *concilium plebis* but to veto, on behalf of the people, any acts of the magistrates and any decree of the senate. The *concilium* was thus a genuinely popular assembly—in 188 it was recorded as having 258,318 eligible voters—and assembled on or alongside the Capitoline Hill, right in the centre of the city. Used with determination the tribunate could thus prove a lever for creating or resisting political change. Tiberius was set on using his powers to achieve land reform. What his motives were is hard to say. His critics saw him as one who was exploiting popular unrest for his own advantage. Tiberius claimed purer motives, no less than the restoration and consolidation of the small landowner whose position, he insisted, was being undermined by the growth of large estates and who was, therefore, being lost for military service (for which landownership was a precondition).

Tiberius’ plan for land reform centred on the *ager publicus*, land owned by the state (much of it originally the territory of defeated Italian cities) that was available for distribution to citizens. Theoretically there was a maximum allocation of 500

iugera (120 hectares) for any individual but many citizens and some members of allied communities had acquired much more. Tiberius proposed that they should surrender the extra in return for a formal confirmation of their right to the rest. The surrendered land would then be distributed among the poor in small plots (of 30 *iugera*, 7 hectares) to which they would be given an inalienable right. They would thus be protected from being bought out by their richer neighbours as well as being retained for military service. The whole procedure would be overseen by a commission of three men.

Politically the cleverness of the proposal was that it did not threaten the concept of private property. Those who would lose out would be those who had been caught out. However, any vigorous use of the *concilium plebis* was bound to be unsettling, particularly when it affected richer landowners. The real problem, however, as recent research is showing (see earlier, p. 398), is that land was already short, that far from estates being enormous they were relatively modest in size, and there was little extra to distribute. This would have made the reforms unworkable in any case but Tiberius made things worse for himself. He showed little regard for the sensitivities of the senate, breaking convention by not consulting with them over his proposals. He then deposed one of his fellow tribunes who opposed him. When news came that the kingdom of Pergamum had been bequeathed to Rome by its last ruler, Tiberius suggested that its treasure could be used to provide money grants for those receiving allotments and that the *concilium plebis* not the senate should discuss the future of its income. This was intruding on the traditional role of the senate as the body responsible for foreign affairs. Most provocatively of all, Tiberius then announced he would stand for a second tribunate, another clear breach of convention that he may have tried to hide under further promises of popular reform.

Tiberius maintained his influence in the *concilium plebis*, whose meetings were swollen by a mass of poor citizens crowding into the city to vote, but he had isolated himself from the ruling classes. The Roman state valued precedent above all things. More astute reformers in Rome, as in Greece, always claimed that they were simply restoring things as they once had been. A search for consensus had become intrinsic to politics. Tiberius was too impetuous for such ploys and when, on one day in the summer of 133, discussion began on his eligibility for a second term, tensions were already high. The *concilium plebis* met on the Capitoline Hill; the senate was meeting at the same time in the nearby temple of Fides. As confused accounts of developments in the *concilium* were relayed to the senate, the *pontifex maximus* (the head of the priesthood), Scipio Nasica, urged the presiding consul in the senate to have Tiberius killed for attempting to set up a tyranny. The consul refused to use force but Scipio Nasica, convinced of the justice of his case, gathered a crowd of supporters who surged towards the Capitoline Hill, where Tiberius was still holding sway. The result was a pitched battle fought with cudgels and sticks. Perhaps 300 died in the crush, including Tiberius, struck on the head, it was said, by a stool wielded by a hostile fellow tribune. The first popular reform movement in Roman history had been stifled but with methods which could only discredit its opponents.

This was the moment, wrote the contemporary historian Sallust, ‘when the nobility began to abuse their prestige and the people their liberty. Each man was taking, seizing and stealing for himself.’

Despite this debacle, the land commission survived, with Tiberius’ brother Gaius as one of its members. It is not clear how far it actually succeeded in setting up new farms; there is little evidence for any major change in landownership in Italy, and many of the wealthier Romans were beginning to invest in land abroad as the empire grew. (For a recent assessment of this difficult area see William V. Harris, ‘The Late Republic,’ chapter 19 in Walter Scheidel, Ian Morris, and Richard Saller (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World*, Cambridge and New York, 2007; paperback edition 2013.) Land hunger remained. New groups who were vying for landownership both in and outside Italy emerged: ambitious freedmen (see further p. 521) and the non-Roman Italians who felt themselves discriminated against by those who held Roman citizenship, especially when land redistribution was involved. In 125 a consul, Fulvius Flaccus, an ally of the Gracchi, proposed that citizenship should be offered to allied cities. The proposal came to nothing but the aspirations of these cities were raised and their frustrated hopes were later to develop into a major threat to Rome.

In 124 Tiberius’ brother Gaius was elected a tribune for 123. Gaius was altogether a more formidable man than his brother. He was endowed with enormous energy, personal charisma, and impressive skills as an orator. Descriptions survive in Plutarch’s *Life* of Gaius striding backwards and forwards across the speaker’s platform, ripping his toga at the height of his emotion, and at work surrounded by a crowd of enthused professionals. Gaius was also more astute as a politician, and when elected tribune his early reforms were aimed at strengthening his power base. For the poorer citizen access to cheap grain was essential, and Gaius stabilized corn prices by instituting a system of bulk buying and storage for sale at a fixed price (thus protecting the poor from variations in the weather and the exploitation of speculators). He attempted to alleviate land hunger by setting up new citizen colonies within Italy and he pushed on with his brother’s land reforms.

Gaius’ legislation suggests he wished to move power away from the senate towards the popular assemblies. To isolate the senate he courted the *equites*, the equestrians, a class originally composed of those able to provide a horse for the cavalry but now defined by a wealth qualification. It was this class that monopolized state contracts (senators being forbidden to take them). Gaius ensured that the right to raise the revenues of the new province of Asia, which had now been created around the wealthy kingdom of Pergamum, should be auctioned in Rome among the equestrians. In Italy itself he initiated road-building projects that were also highly attractive to equestrian contractors. More daringly Gaius allowed equestrians to participate in the courts, first set up in 149, which judged cases brought by provincials against the rapacity of governors. Since many of the complaints were against equestrians, the equestrians had become judges in their own cause, in effect a boosting of their political position within the state. In other laws passed in the

concilium Gaius confirmed and extended certain popular rights. The scale of his success could be seen when he was elected to a second tribunate without any of the opposition his brother had run into.

Gaius' success was not to last. The problem was once again the opposition of allied communities to the work of the land commission. Gaius hoped to buy them off with the promise of Roman citizenship for Latin communities around Rome and the grant of Latin rights, including citizenship for those who migrated to Roman territory, for other allied communities. The proposal was statesmanlike and if implemented might have warded off the damaging Social War which was to break out between Rome and her allies in 91. However, there was no real constituency in support of Gaius' reforms. No citizen, rich or poor, had any interest in sharing citizenship and the senate knew that an influx of new citizens would make their own control of elections harder to maintain. While Gaius was abroad planning another of his schemes, the foundation of a large overseas colony, to be known as Junonia, near the site of Carthage, the senate backed a rival plan to create more citizen colonies within Italy. This was of much greater interest to citizens and Gaius' power base crumbled. His franchise bill was lost and he failed in an attempt to secure a third tribunate.

Without office, any Roman, even one of Gaius' ability, was vulnerable. When an attempt was made in the following year to repeal the law setting up Junonia, Gaius appeared with a crowd of supporters to oppose the repeal. In a scuffle which broke out the servant of one of the consuls, Opimius, was killed and the senate seized on the incident to support Opimius in seeking revenge for what was magnified into an attack on the state. For the first time in Rome's history a decree, the *senatus consultum ultimum*, was passed urging the consuls to see that the state came to no harm. Gaius withdrew his followers to the Aventine Hill, a traditional gathering place of 'the people', but it offered no protection. Opimius attacked ruthlessly and some 3,000 citizens died. Opimius offered a reward for Gaius' head of its weight in gold. When it was finally produced, the story goes that its brains had been scooped out and the cavity filled with lead. Opimius survived an accusation of putting Roman citizens to death without trial.

Only a few years before, Polybius had written in praise of the Roman constitution and the balance it maintained between aristocratic (the senate), monarchical (the consuls), and popular (the assemblies) elements. Now the image of harmony had been shattered. The senate's authority had been shown to be hollow, defensible in the last resort only through force. The *concilium plebis* had emerged as an alternative centre of power that could be manipulated by ambitious tribunes, even if following Gaius' death the tribunate was temporarily quiescent. The equestrians had also gained a new sense of identity, one they could exercise in the courts and, in the upper orders of the *comitia centuriata*, at the elections of consuls and praetors. Outside Rome the allies, offered but then denied the possibility of citizenship, simmered with new discontent. The failure of the Gracchi marked a watershed in the political history of the republic.

Marius and the Defence of the Empire

Any chance of restoring some harmony to the state and respect for the senate was hindered by the continued expansion of the empire. In 133 alone, there had been the capture in Spain of Numantia and the bequest of a whole kingdom, Pergamum, now the province of Asia. In the north Roman businessmen were expanding across the Alps into Gaul. Roman administration had to follow to protect them and by 120 a network of roads and towns, many of them colonies, stretched along the coast towards Spain and inland up rivers such as the Rhône, making up the new province of Transalpine Gaul. In the south, across the Mediterranean, the province of Africa was being settled by Italians for the first time. Aerial surveys show an extensive area, 160 kilometres broad, which appears to have been set aside for land division in these years.

It was unlikely that Roman rule over these vast territories would remain without some challenge. There was as yet no consistency in Rome's approach to conquered territory. The emphasis had been on holding coastlines to ensure that shipping could travel freely, trade expanded, and legions moved. Roman merchants now had the resources and confidence to penetrate new markets, often beyond conquered territory, but the inland boundaries of the empire remained undefined and so they were vulnerable to the hostility of unsubdued tribes. No one could be sure whether the state would move in to protect them if they found themselves in trouble.

Even in annexed areas the status of conquered rulers in relation to the Roman state was unclear. Some were given client-state status, allowing them to rule themselves but always under the watchful eye of Rome. It was uncertain what kind of initiatives by these clients might provoke Rome, especially as Rome's responses would be muddled by the machinations of competing political factions and rival commanders in search of personal glory. Crises were inevitable but it was the way they became entwined with the deteriorating political situation in Rome that makes this such an unstable period in the history of Rome (and yet one of the most fascinating for the historian).

A new crisis came in 111 and it raised all these unresolved issues. The throne of Numidia, a client state of Rome that neighboured the province of Africa, had been seized by a usurper, Jugurtha. In the struggle some Italian businessmen had been massacred and their supporters in the equestrian class demanded action from the senate. The senate's response was hesitant, largely, said the historian Sallust (whose *History of the Jugurthine War* adopts a high moral tone on the matter), due to massive bribes distributed by Jugurtha among Roman senators. However, it is also likely that the senate was reluctant to initiate a war in a distant and unknown territory. It was only when it was clear that Jugurtha had little respect for Roman authority that war was joined in earnest (110).

So Rome had stumbled into another war, yet this time it went slowly and frustration with the senate's handling of it grew both among the equestrian class and the people as a whole. In 107 the assembly presented their own candidate for the consular elections, Gaius Marius, an equestrian, now nearly 50 years old, with a solid

record of military and public service. Marius not only won but, following the precedent established by Scipio Aemilianus in 147, he secured the command in Africa, where he had already served, using the popular assemblies. Thus he bypassed the senate that traditionally allocated provincial commands. Then, instead of going through the normal procedures of conscription, he called for volunteers for his army and, in a break with the convention of centuries, was prepared to take men without property. By 105 Marius had defeated Jugurtha and celebrated his triumph in Rome by having Jugurtha following his chariot in chains.

Africa was not the only part of the empire under threat. In 113 news came of two Germanic tribes, the Cimbri and Teutones, who had embarked on a long and seemingly unfocused migration from central Europe to France which intruded from time to time into Roman territory. Each time they met a Roman army they defeated it. After the final catastrophe, at Arausio in 105, Italy lay completely open to invasion and was only saved by the failure of the Germans to follow up their advantage. Marius seemed the only hope. In 104 he secured a second consulship and then, in defiance of all precedent, another four successive consulships. In two great battles, Aquae Sextia in Provence (102) and Vercelles in northern Italy (101), he defeated the Germans. Now even the senate accepted him as the saviour of the nation.

Marius' problem was the settlement of his troops. Those without land to return to could not simply be disbanded, and he gained the help of one of the tribunes for 103, Lucius Appuleius Saturninus, in securing land for them in Africa. Saturninus had his own plans for using the issue to gain public support (and so restore the influence of the tribunes lost after the crushing of the Gracchi) and, with Marius' veterans called into Rome to overawe his opponents, forced laws through the *concilium plebis* which would have given Marius' men, including those from the allied communities, access to land in Italy as well. The laws were bitterly opposed by the senate. Disorder increased and Saturninus was killed by a lynch mob. Marius' men never got their land in Italy and Marius himself went into exile, now a somewhat discredited figure. Once again violence had infiltrated the political system.

Marius' career had shown that the rules allowing a man only one consulship could be subverted by a determined *concilium* at a time of crisis and the senate could do little to prevent it. Marius' new-style army also marked an important development. If soldiers were without land they were totally dependent on their commanders to look after them after their campaigns had ended. The commander might be encouraged to use them to force land from the state, as Saturninus had attempted to do on Marius' behalf. The failure of the senate to recognize this problem and deal with it was a serious one. Repression of tribunes whenever they attempted reform simply left the underlying tensions unresolved.

The Revolt of the Allies

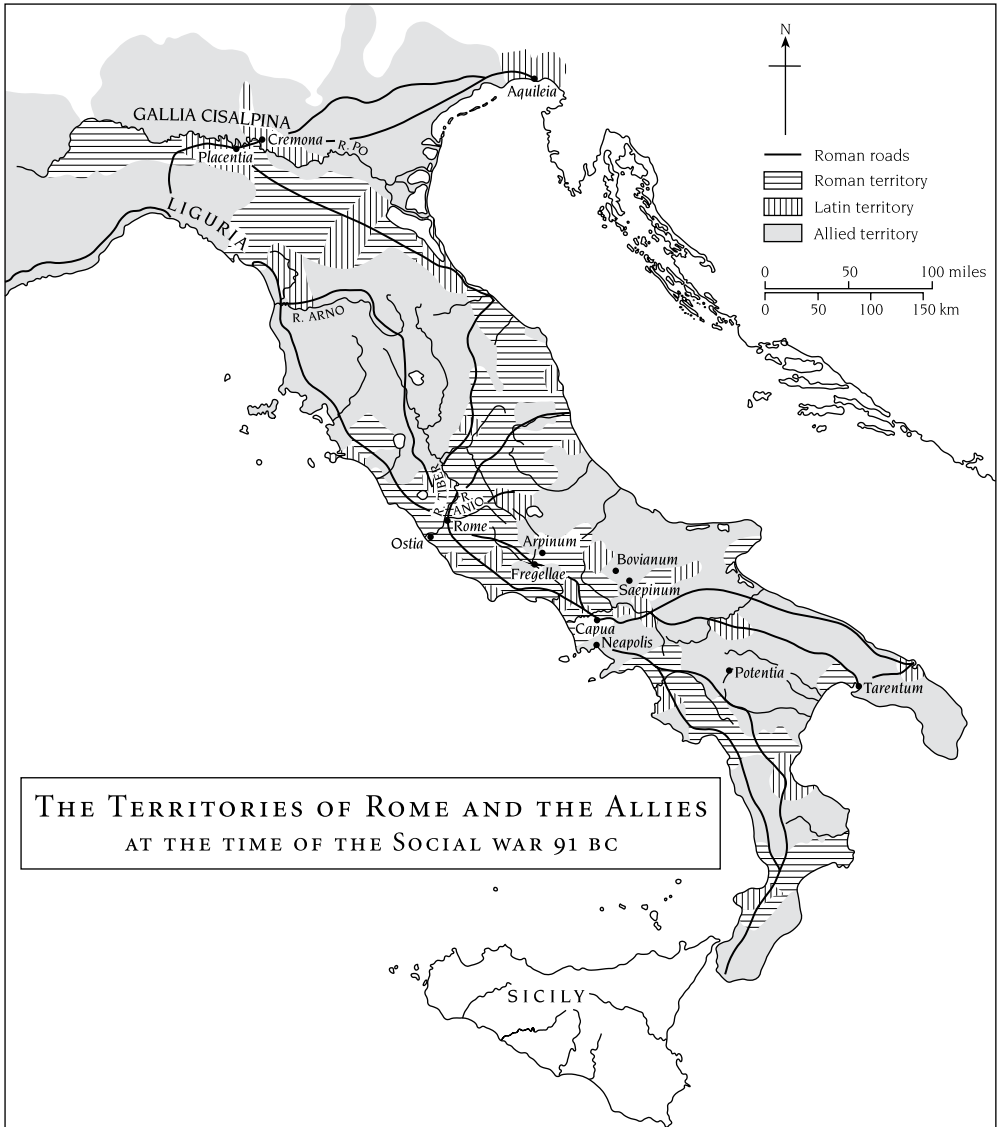
The very success of Marius had intensified another problem. He had relied heavily on allied support to win the war in the north and the allies were deeply conscious

of their indispensability. Certainly their alliances with Rome had not been without their advantages. Allied cities had shared in the general prosperity of the new empire. Campania, for instance, was more advanced than Rome. Theatres, baths, basilicas, and amphitheatres were being built here long before they were known in the capital. At Pietrabbondante in Samnite territory and at Praeneste near Rome imposing shrines had been built. Some of the wealth came from the allied cities' own activities overseas where their businessmen appear to have mixed with Romans on equal terms. Yet in Italy, as noted above, allies were still discriminated against. Cities had to provide troops at Rome's behest, and, while most were happy to join in resisting an attack on Italy itself, service in distant territories such as Spain was increasingly resented. Within Italy they experienced a steady extension of Roman power. Land confiscated by Rome was settled by Roman citizens, Roman roads spread through the peninsula, Roman colonies intruded on allied land. Often individuals treated the locals with contempt—one consul, for instance, ordered a local magistrate to be flogged when the local baths were not cleared and cleaned out fast enough to satisfy his wife.

The hopes of the upper classes of the allied cities now rested on Roman citizenship. Citizenship would give them a chance to participate, through the *concilium plebis*, in the government of the empire and also the rights enjoyed by any citizen against the power of the magistrates. Their hopes were soon dashed by the intransigence of the Roman ruling classes. In 95 a law was passed which allowed the censors to seek out and expel any inhabitant who had falsely claimed citizenship. It was bitterly resented. In 91 one of the tribunes for the year, Livius Drusus, proposed in the *concilium* that citizenship should be extended to the upper classes of the allied cities. This move had more support as it would help create a larger body of rich citizens to balance the multitudes of poor, but many felt Drusus was only interested in building up his own power base. In October 91 he was assassinated.

This new dashing of allied hopes proved a catalyst for revolt. The grievances of the allies were so deep-rooted that over the winter of 91–90 twelve major peoples, prominent among them Rome's old enemies the Samnites, joined to form the state of Italia, with its capital at Corfinium, a city to the east of Rome well protected by the Abruzzi mountains. (The word Italia originally applied only to Calabria, home of a people called *Itali* by the Greeks, but was now extended to the new state.) As an interesting sign of how deeply Roman culture had penetrated, the separatists chose to be governed by two consuls, twelve praetors, and a senate, and their hastily struck coins were clearly imitations of those of Rome, although they carried a personification of 'Italia' on one side. An army of 100,000 men, many of them soldiers well hardened by service in Rome's wars, gathered to defend the new state.

Rome managed to raise 150,000 troops but for the first year of the war was put on the defensive by the determined and well-organized rebels. This was a major crisis right in the core of the fledgling empire and very similar to those that had destroyed incipient empires in the Ancient Near East. Rome decided to compromise. In 90 she granted citizenship to all those allies who had stayed loyal and probably as well to those who agreed to lay down their arms. With the opposition split she then



MAP 10

crushed the remaining insurgents, whose unity disintegrated with time. As in earlier times the Samnites proved the hardest to defeat but in many parts of Italy the economy was disrupted, land ravaged, and thousands killed as the war was brought to a close. Eventually when peace came citizenship had been extended to all communities south of the Po. Italian unification had been achieved but the price, in terms of disruption and lingering bitterness, was high.

Sulla

The Social War ('social' from *socii*, allies) lasted longest in the south. The rebels had looked for help from outside and had made contact with a new enemy of Rome, Mithridates, king of Pontus, a mountainous yet fertile kingdom on the edge of the Black Sea. Mithridates was shrewd and manipulative with the aspirations, though not the military talents, of an Alexander. Over a long reign (it had begun in 120) he had noted the growing arrogance of the Roman equestrians and their unashamed plundering of Asia and he sensed the overconfidence of rulers who had not been seriously challenged in battle in the east for eighty years.

Mithridates may have been pushed into action when the Romans unwisely encouraged an invasion of his territory by his neighbour, Nicomedes of Bithynia, but his timing was probably conditioned by the knowledge that Rome was preoccupied with the Social War. In 89 he invaded Bithynia and by 88 he had reached the province of Asia where he called on the Greeks to slaughter Italian citizens and their families. It was said that some 80,000 were killed in a night, so deep rooted was the hatred of Roman exploitation. The Asian Greeks rallied to Mithridates as a saviour, and further afield, in Athens, there was a democratic coup in his support. The fragility of the empire's overseas conquests had again been exposed.

A consul was needed to restore control and one of those elected for 88, Lucius Cornelius Sulla, was granted the command. Sulla was of an old but not particularly distinguished patrician family and his main claim to fame was his success as a commander in the south of Italy during the Social War. As he was about to leave for the east he found his position challenged by a tribune, Publius Sulpicius. Sulpicius had developed a plan to distribute the newly enfranchised allied citizens among the existing tribal groups into which Roman citizens were divided in the *concilium*, doubtless in the hope of calling on their aid when he needed it. In order to gain Marius' support for his plans he promised Marius, now aged 70, that he would secure him the eastern command in place of Sulla. Once again responses to the challenges of empire overseas had become inextricably mixed with domestic politics. (For Sulla, see the standard, perhaps too apologetic, biography by A. Keaveney, *Sulla: The Last Republican*, 2nd edition, London and New York, 2005.)

Sulpicius' plan was clearly unconstitutional as Marius was not even one of the consuls for the year. Sulla would have been completely humiliated if it had succeeded and was left with little option but to defend his dignity. He persuaded his legions to follow him to Rome. It was a momentous decision, understandable in terms of Sulla's frustration but outrageous otherwise. For the first time a Roman army was being led into Rome, across the *pomerium*, the hallowed boundary of the city, to be used against other Romans. There was no effective force to resist it though citizens pelted the troops from the rooftops. Sulla was triumphant. He pushed through a decree in the senate outlawing Sulpicius, Marius, and their supporters. Marius fled to Africa where he knew his veterans would welcome him. Sulpicius was betrayed by a slave and killed. Sulla dealt ruthlessly with the remaining opposition before departing at last for Asia.

However, once Sulla had left Italy fresh unrest broke out, again over the distribution of citizens. A consul for 87, Lucius Cornelius Cinna, tried to revive Sulpicius' proposals but was obstructed by the other consul, a nominee of Sulla's. Cinna was forced to flee the city but now sought out Marius and the two returned to besiege Rome. They captured the city and in 86 Cinna and Marius held the consulships, Marius' seventh. Marius died shortly afterwards but Cinna managed to hold four successive consulships and, although the details are obscure, appears to have maintained stability. Sulla was declared an outlaw.

In Asia Sulla, despite having been 'officially' deprived of his command, was rebuilding his position with the harshness that was his hallmark. Athens was retaken and the supporters of Mithridates slaughtered. The Piraeus was burnt down and treasures, including one of the great libraries and columns from the unfinished temple of Olympian Zeus, carried off from the city. In Asia the reconquered cities were crushed and burdened with enormous indemnities. Mithridates, whose popularity among the Greeks collapsed as soon as the scale of the Roman retribution became clear, surrendered all his conquests and retreated to his kingdom.

This was enough for Sulla. He now had the glory of victory to back his return to Rome for revenge. As soon as he landed in Italy in 83 he initiated a civil war in which communities and peoples who had supported Marius, which included the Samnites, were crushed. Then Sulla set out on the systematic elimination of his remaining opponents. Cinna had already died in an army mutiny in 84. A list of between 2,000 and 9,000 equestrians and senators was drawn up, any of whom could be freely killed for reward. Their land was confiscated and distributed among Sulla's veterans, a process which caused renewed disruption in Italy on an immense scale. In 82 Sulla entered Rome yet again with an army and declared himself dictator, a post normally held only for six months but held by Sulla with no declared limit. Coins celebrated his 'victory'.

Sulla, however, was more than a revengeful tyrant. He had a plan for constitutional reform based on the restoration of the power and prestige of the senate. It was to be enlarged to 600 members (from the traditional 300). The extra 300 members had to come from the equestrian class and their appointment gave Sulla the chance to pack the senate with those loyal to himself. Meanwhile the equestrian class lost their right to sit on juries, which were from now on to be reserved for senators. To hinder the rise of popular leaders Sulla insisted that the traditional rules about magistracies be restored. No one could be praetor before the age of 39 or consul before 42, an age when ambition might be already on the wane. No one could hold the same magistracies twice within ten years. Finally Sulla decreed that anyone who had held the position of tribune could hold no other magistracy, neutralizing the post as a stepping-stone to the more senior magistracies. Tribunes could no longer introduce legislation in the *concilium* without the prior approval of the senate. His new system complete, Sulla then, to the surprise of many, retired from office. He died in 78.

It was during these years that violence had entered the political system and begun to corrode it. Armies had fought within Rome, the constitution had been subverted

by force, Italy had been unsettled by massive confiscations of land. Sulla's restoration of the senate was, in the circumstances, an artificial one, especially as many experienced men had been proscribed. Almost immediately it came under pressure. The tribunes started agitating for the restoration of their powers and clashed on several occasions with the consuls. Among their most popular campaigns was one against the corruption of Sulla's senatorial courts after it became clear that massive bribery was being used to secure verdicts. Popular unrest was fuelled by several years of high corn prices. There were also direct challenges to the state. One of the consuls for 78, Lepidus, having quarrelled with his fellow consul, put himself at the head of a mass of dispossessed landowners in Etruria, while a former supporter of Marius, Quintus Sertorius, returned to Spain (where he had originally been governor) and built up such effective support among the native peasantry that senatorial control of the province was lost.

The Rise of Pompey

It was clearly a desperate time, and Sulla's senators failed to match up to the role the dictator had created for them. In fact, in a fatal abdication of responsibility, they undermined the whole purpose of Sulla's reforms by turning to a young commander who was not even a member of the senate to save them. This was Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus—Pompey. Pompey, the son of a former consul, had made his entry into public life by raising three legions in support of Sulla in 83 and using them so effectively that he earned himself the nickname *adulescentulus carnifex*, 'the teenage butcher'. After campaigns on behalf of Sulla in Sicily and Africa, Pompey persuaded the dictator to allow him a triumph and the cognomen Magnus, 'the Great'. (An attempt to hold the triumph in appropriate Pompeian style failed when the elephants he had secured to pull his chariot became stuck in the city gate!) He was still only 25 and like Mithridates, later to be his adversary, he had aspirations to be an Alexander. (A celebrated marble head of Pompey dating from an original of about 55 BC portrays him, in fact, with a hairstyle similar to that given by Hellenistic sculptors to Alexander.) Now the senate granted him a special command to deal with Lepidus. What pressures Pompey put on the senate to secure his command are unknown, but it was a rash decision to entrust troops to a man whose personal ambitions seemed without limit. (The standard biography of Pompey is Robin Seager, *Pompey: A Political Biography*, Oxford, 2012.)

Pompey's career had already shown that he would not be easy to control, but it was equally clear that he was one of the most able men in the state, energetic, ruthless when he needed to be, and with fine administrative skills. He cleaned up Lepidus' revolt quickly and then departed for Spain. Sertorius was a much tougher adversary and victory only came in 72 when, worn down by the strain of continual fighting, he was assassinated by a rival commander, whom Pompey soon defeated. As soon as Pompey returned to Rome the senate asked him to mop up another revolt, the massive uprising of slaves led by the Thracian gladiator Spartacus. This had been an

extraordinary success. In 72 both consuls had been defeated by the 70,000-strong force of slaves (mostly drawn from the countryside) that Spartacus had forged into a fighting force. If he had managed to discipline them more effectively he might have achieved even more, but in 71 no less than six legions were sent against him, his forces were split, and the revolt ended with a gruesome parade of 6,000 crucified slaves lining the road from Rome to Capua where the uprising had begun.

Pompey arrived back just as order was being restored but typically he claimed the glory for the suppression of the revolt. In fact the final assault on Spartacus had been led by an older man of more noble background than Pompey, Marcus Licinius Crassus, who was furious at being upstaged by this young adventurer. Crassus could not be ignored by Pompey. He was a man of immense wealth, much of it gained through unscrupulous profiteering during the reign of Sulla. He had built a network of clients among the senate and equestrian businessmen. Pompey realized that Crassus had his uses and the two men agreed to stand for the consulships of the year 70. Both retained their armies to make sure the senate acquiesced.

This was yet another example of Pompey's ambition and arrogance. He had not even held a quaestorship, let alone a seat in the senate, yet such was the influence he held over an overawed and grateful senate that the senators decreed he could be excused from these requirements. When he arrived to take his seat as presiding officer he had to follow the instructions from a book specifically composed for him by a scholarly friend, the writer Varro. He and Crassus then proceeded to undo Sulla's reforms by restoring their original powers to the tribunes and opening the juries once again to equestrians, giving non-senators a majority on each jury. These reforms were widely welcomed and enhanced Pompey's popularity among the people, though they did nothing to gain him the trust of the senate.

After his consulship Pompey retired into private life. His motives can only be guessed at. Even those who were close to him always found them difficult to fathom. He must have known that he had little popularity in the senate and he was not one to bother with the constant nurturing of political relationships which were essential if he was to create a following there. He saw himself as above such trivialities and he probably sensed that simply by waiting on events new crises would arise which he would be the only one able to solve. He was soon proved right. In the east Mithridates was on the move again.

In 74 king Nicomedes of Bithynia, the kingdom neighbouring Pontus, had bequeathed it to Rome. Mithridates, angry at this extension of the Roman empire, invaded Bithynia and a force was sent under the consul for 74, Lucius Licinius Lucullus, to oppose him. Lucullus was remarkably successful. He forced Mithridates out of Bithynia, invaded Pontus and captured two of its major cities, then led his troops on a gruelling campaign through Armenia, whose king Tigranes was the son-in-law and ally of Mithridates. Finally, Lucullus, conscious of the need for long-term stability in Asia, curbed the excesses of the equestrians, reducing the heavy burdens imposed on the Asian cities by Sulla. This was to be his undoing. In Rome a campaign against him was instituted by those furious at this intervention in their concerns and much was made of the exhaustion of Lucullus' troops and his

failure to destroy Mithridates. (Lucullus had wisely decided not to pursue him into the mountains of Anatolia.) There is little doubt that Pompey had his contacts among the campaigners.

More immediately pressing was the turmoil caused by pirates. They were causing havoc in the eastern Mediterranean. Even the corn supplies to Rome were being disrupted, a major threat to a volatile city the size of Rome. The confidence of the pirates was such that they even dared penetrate inland, sacking shrines in Greece, burning part of the harbour at Ostia, and, on one of their raids into Italy, successfully capturing two praetors. Someone was needed to take the problem in hand. The senate was bitterly opposed to giving Pompey yet another command and it was left to one of the tribunes, Gabinius, who proposed to the *concilium* in 67 that someone chosen from among the former consuls should be appointed. Everyone knew that Pompey was the man intended and there was fierce opposition from both senators and other tribunes before the law was passed. Once it was through, however, it was followed by another that named Pompey and granted him the enormous force of 500 ships, 120,000 infantry, and 5,000 cavalry. His command was to cover the Mediterranean sea and all its islands, and would run 80 kilometres inland.

Pompey had broken free of senatorial control but more than repaid the trust the people placed in him. The Mediterranean was divided into thirteen areas, each under a legate, a deputy, and the pirates were driven eastwards, releasing the important corn-supplying provinces of Sardinia, Sicily, and Africa from their grip. Within three months (rather than the three years which had been expected) the pirates had been chased to their strongholds in Cilicia and the problem was under control. Even Pompey's enemies were impressed, and when the command against Mithridates finally came his way in 66 its award aroused much less opposition. (Like the previous command, it was actually granted through the *concilium*.) Once again Pompey was given wide-ranging powers, the absolute right while he was in Asia to make peace and war and any necessary political settlements on condition that these were ratified by the senate on his return home.

Commands were there to be used not just to save the empire but to boost personal prestige and wealth and Pompey was determined to use his powers to maximum effect. Once he had relieved Lucullus of his command (Lucullus angrily told Pompey that he was like a vulture feasting on the carrion other beasts had killed), Pompey scotched an attempt by Mithridates to come to terms by asking for impossible conditions in return. It would do no good to bring the war to an end too soon and deprive himself of glory and plunder. Mithridates was driven northwards to the Bosphorus and then Pompey dealt with Armenia, reducing it to the status of a client kingdom of Rome. Further campaigns in 64 and 63 saw the annexation of Syria, the last remnant of the Seleucid state that had already been occupied by king Tigranes of Armenia. Further south, in Judaea, Pompey captured Jerusalem after a siege of three months. Although he left the treasures of the city intact he insisted on entering the Holy of Holies in the Temple, a blatant act of desecration. Judaea became a client kingdom of Rome and eventually, in AD 6, an official part of the empire. News then came through that Mithridates had committed suicide.

Pompey could now organize the east as he wished. Three new provinces were created. Cilicia, hitherto held by the Romans along the coast, was extended inland so that its western border ran alongside the province of Asia. Cyprus was added to the province in 58 after the Romans had extracted it from Egyptian control. The province of Syria included the former Seleucid capital of Antioch and extended southwards along the coastline to take in the ancient Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon and inland to the Euphrates. Beyond lay Parthia, and it was one of the few weaknesses of the settlement that Syria remained vulnerable to attack from the Parthians, attacks made more likely by the contemptuous way Pompey and others had treated the Parthian kings. Along the southern shores of the Black Sea ran the province of Bithynia and Pontus carved from the former kingdoms of Nicomedes and Mithridates. Pompey divided the province into eleven communities, each with an urban centre for easier administration. Flanking these provinces to the east was a series of client kingdoms, Colchis, Commagene, Judaea, and Armenia among them. All were required to pay tribute to Rome.

It was an extraordinary achievement. Pompey had removed the instability of the eastern conquests and reorganized the region to provide a vast income from taxes and tribute for Rome. For himself he had gained wealth (military victory was always a provider of riches as there were few legal restrictions on what the commander took for himself), political glory, and a host of men and territories that now counted themselves as his clients. There is little wonder that back in Rome the senators and many others were apprehensive about his return. If he kept his armies intact he was unchallengeable. This was how vulnerable the republic had become.

Cicero and the Catiline Conspiracy

In fact while Pompey was away there had been another political crisis in Rome. Among the contenders for the consulship of 63 had been one Lucius Sergius Catilina, usually known as Catiline. The story that follows is vividly told in one of the earliest works of Roman history, *The Conspiracy of Catiline* by Sallust (as his Roman name is Anglicized, 86–c.35 BC), which was to become one of the staples of the Latin curriculum. Catiline was of an obscure patrician family but his fortunes had benefited, like many others, from the proscriptions of Sulla. In the early 60s he had been accused of extortion and it was not until 64 that he was free to stand for the consulship. Having failed then he tried again in 63 (for the year 62), campaigning on a programme which included the abolition of all debts. The hope was that Pompey's settlement in the east would finance the purchase of land on which the landless poor could be settled. A variety of discontents, including spendthrift nobles and unsuccessful farmers, were attracted to Catiline and when he was once again unsuccessful in the elections there was talk of an armed uprising among his frustrated followers in Etruria.

One of the successful consuls for 63 was Marcus Tullius Cicero, perhaps the most gifted and versatile orator and man of letters Rome was ever to produce. Cicero had

been born outside Rome, at Marius' birthplace, Arpinum, in 106 and had come to Rome as a boy, to study law. He spent only a short time in the army and was soon back in Rome making his way as an advocate in the courts. There was no shortage of opportunities for those with talent. The confiscations of Sulla had left a host of embittered landowners while continued Roman expansion overseas had allowed all manner of corruption and extortion to flourish. Within Rome bribery at elections had become frequent. Prosecutions for these excesses could be brought both by the state and private individuals but usually became entangled in the personal rivalries of aristocratic families. As cases were decided by juries, much depended on swaying their members with impassioned oratory. Cicero excelled at the forensic speech where facts were combined with emotion to destroy an opponent.

After some initial success in Rome Cicero developed his talents through two years' intensive study of rhetoric in Greece. Back in Rome his fame grew and in 75 he became the first man to be elected as quaestor without the normal ten years of military service. He spent his term in office in Sicily and it was as a result of contacts there that he was asked, in 70, to take on the prosecution of a notorious governor, Gaius Verres, who had ruthlessly plundered the island in the late 70s. Cicero's opening speech was so devastating (it still reads well) that not only was Verres forced into exile but his own defending counsel, Hortensius, hitherto the most respected in Rome, never recovered his reputation. Cicero was now seen as the leading orator in the city. He was elected praetor in 66 and then a consul for 63. (Anthony Everitt, *Cicero: The Life and Times of Rome's Greatest Politician*, London, 2001; New York, 2002, is excellent but so too is the older Elizabeth Rawson, *Cicero: A Portrait*, London, 1975, reissued as a Bristol Classical paperback, 2009. Rawson is particularly interested in Cicero's philosophical works.)

It was Cicero's duty as consul to defend the state and he took on the job with relish. His experience of exploiting the emotional volatility of the juries had taught him how to project himself to crowds and he appeared in the senate, dramatically arrayed with armour under his toga, to denounce Catiline to his face. Catiline fled to Etruria where an uprising had already begun, whereupon Cicero unmasked five fellow conspirators in Rome itself and with the support of the senate had them executed. Catiline assumed leadership of the Etrurian rebels but they were no match for the legions sent against them. Catiline and his followers were wiped out.

For Cicero it was his finest hour and many among the senators agreed, heaping him with titles, 'father of his country', 'the new founder of Rome'. Cicero himself never tired of retelling the story (he wrote a long letter to Pompey on the subject, which was received with some coolness by a man who was understandably sensitive to any threat of being upstaged), and from now on saw himself as some kind of senior statesman with a particular responsibility for guiding the state through the turbulent times that confronted it. But the adulation did not last. For many senators Cicero remained a social parvenu, moreover one who had never held military command. His support was destined to remain limited. More ominously, as the exhilaration of the moment faded, there were those who questioned whether he had been

justified in putting to death Roman citizens, in this case those conspirators rounded up in Rome, without trial. It was a question that was to haunt Cicero.

The year 62 was overshadowed by the return of Pompey. No one knew what he would demand when he reached Italy. His feelings had always been well concealed and his contempt for normal constitutional practice well known. In the event as soon as he landed at Brundisium in December he disbanded his army, to the genuine amazement of all. His reasons remain unclear. He may have simply decided that from now on he was going to preside as a senior figure within the constitution and must be seen therefore to be acting correctly. More likely he felt that his prestige was so high that he did not need to bother with armed force. He set out, virtually alone, for Rome to seek the official confirmation by the senate of his settlement in the east and a law to allow him to settle his veterans.

Here he was in for a shock. His first speech to the senate fell completely flat. In effect, the senate, led by such figures as Lucullus, whose command Pompey had relieved in Asia, and Marcus Porcius Cato, great-grandson of the censor and as petulant in his conservatism, would have nothing to do with a man they still considered an upstart who had broken all the sacred conventions of the constitution. (This Cato is normally referred to as Cato of Utica, a north African port where he served as governor.) When Pompey tried to win over Cato by proposing himself as a husband to one of Cato's unmarried relations he was coldly rejected. Despite several attempts to pass it through the senate Pompey's settlement remained unratified and his troops, though disbanded, without land. Even an attempt in 60 by a tribune to push through a land bill failed when a consul, Metellus, rallied the senate in opposition to it. Only a magnificent triumph held in 61 briefly revived the glory Pompey had once known.

The Political System in the 60s: An Overview

Recent archaeological excavations in the area between the Roman Forum and the Arch of Titus have revealed the foundations of a series of grand aristocratic houses dating from the middle of the first century BC. There is some continuing dispute about the ownership of each, but one study identifies those of Cicero, his brother Quintus, and his arch-rival Clodius (see below). The lavish decoration of the homes and the large slave quarters found in one (room for possibly fifty domestic slaves) have suggested not only the opulence of the elite in the later republic but the ways in which their homes were used as a propaganda display in support of their political ambitions.

The finds support the view that the 60s and 50s were years of increased aristocratic competition for election to the magistracies. The consulships and praetorships (elected by the conservative *comitia centuriata*) remained the goal of every ambitious man but they had to be reached through the lower magistracies (elected by the *concilium*). At each step of a political career further advancement became more difficult. Under half of those who became quaestors could become praetors

and only two of each set of six or eight praetors a consul. Men standing for the lower magistracies had also to sell themselves to an electorate that, after the Social War, was much larger and more volatile. The disruptions of the Social War and the civil wars of Sulla had led to Rome being packed with refugees from the upheavals. The contenders for the magistracies could, as they had always done, play on the antiquity and achievements of their family and their own military record. However, effective oratory now had a greater impact, one reason why a 'new man' such as Cicero had been able to gain a consulship. The crowds also responded to those who would spend on their behalf. This is why the post of aedile, whose responsibilities included the administration of games, became so sought after. Spectacular public entertainment was always popular. Behind the scenes the direct bribery of voters seems to have been on the increase and was a common subject of private prosecutions between rivals. (See further Fergus Millar, *The Crowd in Rome in the Late Republic*, Ann Arbor, 2002.)

There were no political parties or platforms as such in Rome but there were certain policies that were bound to appeal to the mass of citizens. They warmed to military victory and expected wars to be fought competently. (It had been popular initiatives that had led to the appointment of Marius to his commands in the military crisis at the end of the second century.) They valued their own rights and the defence of these by the tribunes and were correspondingly suspicious of the powers of the senate. They were always ready to respond to those who would offer land (especially for retired soldiers) or, in the city, a more effective and cheaper supply of corn. As competition for the magistracies increased there was every temptation for candidates to appeal to these popular concerns. Those who did so were dubbed by their opponents *populares*, 'those pandering to the people'. Those, on the other hand, who wished to uphold traditional senatorial authority against the demands of the assemblies, called themselves *optimates*, 'the best men'.

Traditionally a consulship had been followed by little more than a respected position in the senate for life but from the time of Sulla it had become more common for the consuls to stay at home and be sent overseas *after* their term of office. Such overseas commands could be granted by either the senate or the assemblies and, most significant of all, they could be prolonged. In the 70s Metellus Pius had spent nine consecutive years in Spain and Lucius Lucullus eight in the east. These special commands presented an extended opportunity to achieve military glory and wealth as well as allowing the commander to build up a dependent and therefore loyal army. They thus offered a potential threat to the republic. As Pompey had shown in Asia, once abroad a commander operated largely beyond the control of the senate. It was only when he returned that the senate could refuse to ratify any decisions he had made overseas or hinder the settlement of his troops. Such obstruction resolved nothing. It was true that Pompey, faced with opposition from the senate on his return, had not overthrown the state, but somehow his business had to be settled and this is why he now turned to a newly elected consul, Julius Caesar, for help.

The Young Caesar

Julius Caesar is perhaps the best known of all the Romans, his name transmitted into later European history as Kaiser and Tsar and incorporated into the western calendar (July), with his assassination remaining one of the most vivid folk memories of European culture. He had been born in 100 BC to a family which was patrician in origin (and actually claimed a divine founder, Venus) but at the time of his birth not a distinguished nor a rich one. He had had to make his own way and showed no hesitation in doing so. He was talented, ambitious, and a particularly fine speaker ('the most eloquent of the Romans,' as Cicero generously described him). One of his finest qualities was a magnanimity towards those he had defeated, a rare trait among commanders of the time. (A full, well-written biography is by Adrian Goldsworthy, *Caesar: Life of a Colossus*, New Haven and London, 2006.)

What marked Caesar out from his many rival candidates for office was his consistent use of the cause of the *populares* in support of his ambitions. In 69 he made a public declaration of his commitment to the cause of the people by delivering the funeral oration at the death of his aunt, the widow of their hero Marius, and when he was elected aedile in 65 he restored the trophies of Marius that Sulla had removed from the Capitoline Hill. His popularity was consolidated by massive spending, and it paid off in 63 when he was elected *pontifex maximus*, chief priest, a post of great dignity held for life and traditionally reserved for former consuls. (The importance of priesthoods had risen and they were now seen as one of the most prestigious forms of aristocratic attainment.) It was an extraordinary achievement for such a comparatively young man. It was followed in 62 by his election as a praetor.

Caesar's electioneering had left him heavily in debt. His best hope now was a command overseas, and one, as governor of Further Spain, was assigned to him in the ballot through which provinces were allocated. In order to escape his creditors Caesar had to have his debts underwritten by Crassus, who had become a specialist in the business of buying political support through loans, before he could leave Rome. Once in Spain Caesar had few difficulties in engineering a campaign that took him beyond the western border of his province as far as the Atlantic coast. It was his first taste of successful generalship and as a victorious commander he was entitled to most of the plunder. He returned home with enough wealth to finance his next ambition. This was to become one of the consuls for 59. By now the optimates were becoming wary of his ambitions and the elections were bitterly contested. However, there was no stopping Caesar now that he was backed by money and fame, and the most the optimates could do was to have their own candidate, Bibulus, elected as Caesar's fellow consul.

The Republic and Provincial Administration

The Romans had never shown any hesitation in declaring that their wars of conquest were justified and they showed no inhibitions in asserting their right to rule

others. Their confidence in Rome's destiny found justification in the famous words of Virgil in Book VI of the *Aeneid*.

Others will cast more tenderly in bronze
 Their breathing figures, I can well believe,
 And bring more lifelike portraits out of marble;
 Argue more eloquently, use the pointer
 To trace the paths of heaven accurately
 And accurately foretell the rising stars.
 Roman, remember by your strength to rule
 Earth's people—for your arts are to be these:
 To pacify, to impose the rule of law,
 To spare the conquered, battle down the proud.

(Translation: Robert Fitzgerald)

This was an idealistic view of imperialism. In the early years there were few restraints on plunder. The election system made it inevitable that governorships would be used to recoup election expenses and individual governors went well beyond fulfilling this need. The misdeeds of Gaius Verres, the corrupt governor of Sicily between 73 and 70 BC, stand out because of the remorseless way they were catalogued by Cicero in his celebrated speeches of prosecution that made his name. Cicero details his exactions:

I affirm [said Cicero] that in the whole of Sicily, in a province which is so wealthy and old, which has so many towns and so many rich family estates, there is no silver vase, neither Corinthian nor Delian, no gem or pearl, no object of gold or of ivory, no bronze, marble or ivory statue, no picture either painted on a tablet or woven on a tapestry, which he [Verres] has not sought out, inspected, and, if it pleased him, stolen.

It was also common for governors to collaborate with the equestrian *publicani* who collected the taxes, if only to acquire valuable allies to support them if prosecuted. The depth of resentment that resulted can be seen in the alacrity with which Greeks massacred Roman businessmen in Asia when called on by Mithridates to do so (earlier, p. 406). The resentment of the provincials was more marked because within Italy itself direct taxation for Roman citizens in Italy had been abolished in 167 BC.

However, the reputation of the Roman republic for condoning corruption does need to be qualified. Verres' misdeeds are recorded because he was successfully brought before a Roman court after an appeal by the Sicilians for justice. The evidence was so overwhelming that Verres, despite having influential supporters, went into exile after Cicero's opening speech. There was in fact a tension between those who indulged in or condoned exploitation of the empire and those who had the vision or prudence to see that unrestrained plundering was immoral and self-defeating. Lucullus, who commanded the Roman armies in the east against Mithridates between 73 and 70 BC, the same years that Verres was governor in Sicily, worked hard to stem the abuses of the equestrians of Asia. (It did him little good as the embittered equestrians simply stirred up opposition to him in Rome.) In 59 BC as part of his legislation in his first year as consul, Caesar passed a law (the *lex*

Iulia de repetundis) that brought together and enhanced existing legislation on how a governor should behave. Its many clauses dealt with such varied topics as bribery, the unfair requisition of grain, abuse of local privileges, and unjustified demands for ‘hospitality’. At the end of his term of office a governor had to deposit copies of his accounts both in his province and at Rome.

Pompey made his own contribution by breaking the link that connected heavy election expenses with a subsequent governorship that could recoup them through requiring a five-year break between a magistracy and a governorship (the *lex Pompeia de provinciis* of 52 BC). The five-year gap meant that there was a temporary shortage of qualified magistrates to act as governors, and it was in the following year, 51 BC, that Cicero himself was persuaded to become governor of Cilicia. He was reluctant to leave Rome (‘All service in the provinces, as I realized long ago when I was young,’ he later wrote in his urbane manner, ‘is dull and sordid for one who is able to shine in the city’) but once arrived in Cilicia, in July, he set about becoming a model governor. His immediate task lay in keeping good order and arranging for the fair but firm collection of taxation. He decided to use the remaining summer months of 51 for what fighting needed to be done and the winter for court work.

Cicero was accompanied, as every governor was, by legates (the term refers to one who holds delegated authority), in his case all experienced soldiers, to whom he entrusted the pacification of the borders between Cilicia and Syria. (He hoped, in vain as it proved, that their success might enable him to be given a triumph.) So far as the exploitation of the locals was concerned, the previous governor had been, in Cicero’s words, ‘a beast’, and a great deal needed to be done to soothe discontent. Much of Cicero’s work lay, in fact, in resolving disagreements between tax collectors and provincials. He tried to encourage cities to solve their own disputes when these did not involve Roman citizens (these cases the governor normally judged himself) and to sort out their financial muddles. (He was also asked to provide panthers for shows in Rome but reported back that he was unable to trap any!) Just how much of a gold mine provincial government had become for most of its administrators could be seen at the end of his term of office when Cicero proposed paying back his unused expenses to the treasury in Rome. His quaestor, the deputy responsible for financial affairs, and legates were furious at being deprived of what they had come to see as their legitimate perks.

Consulship and Command: Caesar Consolidates his Position

Ultimately effective and principled administration of the provinces depended on stable government in Rome. By 59 Caesar had marked himself out as a remarkable man, a supporter of the cause of the *populares* who was both consul and *pontifex maximus*. He saw the advantage of an agreement with Pompey that could harness the latter’s popular appeal to his own cause. Crassus had also to be brought in although he was bound to be an uneasy bedfellow. The agreement the three made was

little more than an offer of mutual support in achieving their immediate aims. For Pompey this was, naturally, ratification of his settlement and land for his veterans, for Crassus favourable treatment for a group of his supporters who found they had bid too high for the privilege of collecting taxes in Asia. In return for using his consular power to achieve these ends Caesar expected support for a further overseas command at the end of his consulship.

Caesar was not to disappoint his allies. He introduced in the senate a land law to allow for the settlement of Pompey's veterans. It was a moderate one. Some of the wealth Pompey had brought home from his conquests was to be used to purchase land from willing sellers. The senate, however, would do nothing to support Caesar and he was forced to turn to the people. With Pompey's veterans crowding the Forum he pushed the land law through the *concilium*. Caesar then secured a law revising the terms for Crassus' tax collectors and another ratifying Pompey's settlement in the east. All the while Bibulus attempted to obstruct Caesar through what was in fact the perfectly legal device of scanning the skies and declaring the omens were unfavourable for business. Even the *pontifex maximus* could not counter such tactics and many of Caesar's laws were technically invalid. He was open to prosecution by the optimates if at any time he lost the protective power of *imperium* that he enjoyed as consul or would enjoy as holder of a subsequent command.

Caesar, however, was in no mood to change course. In April 59 he embarked on a much more provocative land law, one that would distribute public land in Campania to some 20,000 citizens, mostly veterans and urban poor. In effect Pompey was having his own supporters settled not far from Rome. Fears of what Pompey and Caesar were up to were intensified when Pompey married Caesar's only daughter Julia (a political alliance which, in the event, proved a genuine love match). Many now believed that Pompey and Caesar were after some form of dictatorship. Pompey, who was acutely sensitive to disapproval, found to his horror that his name was hissed in the theatre and his speeches in the senate greeted with silence. Caesar meanwhile had rewarded himself with a special five-year command in Gaul and Illyricum, one that would give him every opportunity to enhance his glory. (It was pushed through the *concilium* by a friendly tribune.) Pompey bullied the senate into adding governorship of the province of Transalpine Gaul to the command.

Among those who were apprehensive about the growing power of Pompey and Caesar was Cicero. In a speech in the courts as early as March 59 he dared to complain about the political situation. It was not clear what wider support he actually had but in the hopes of containing him Caesar and Pompey engineered the election as a tribune of a raffish aristocrat, Publius Clodius. Clodius loathed Cicero, who had testified against him when he had been on trial for sacrilege. Clodius could now have his revenge by using his office to attack Cicero over the execution of the Catilinian conspirators. Caesar offered to give Cicero protection (he had, in fact, some personal admiration for him) but Cicero was having none of it. However, he turned out to be particularly vulnerable. While reluctant to support Pompey and Caesar, it soon became clear that, as a *novus homo*, he had no real standing either among the optimates. Having used him as their figurehead during Catiline's con-

spiracy, they now had few inhibitions about discarding him. Cicero had been outmanoeuvred although in truth he lacked the steely temperament and ruthlessness now needed for political survival.

Once a tribune (for the year 58), Clodius quickly showed he was no mere creature of his patrons Caesar and Pompey. He had a clearly worked out programme specifically designed to win the support of the urban *plebs*. The two most popular measures were a law that allowed free corn handouts for the poor and another allowing the trade associations, the *collegia*, which had been banned in 64 after they had become centres for electoral bribery and intimidation, to operate freely once more. Exploiting his popularity, Clodius was also able to pass in the *concilium* a law exiling anyone who had condemned a citizen to death without trial. He could hold this over Cicero, who now found that neither Pompey nor Caesar felt obliged to support him. Without waiting for the prosecution that was now inevitable Cicero left Rome for exile in Macedonia. Once he had left, Clodius allowed his personal gang of roughs to ransack Cicero's magnificent house near the Palatine.

In 58 Caesar left Rome to take up his commands. The potential for the glory of victory was immense. There had been continuing unrest among the tribes in Gaul and reports of a migration by one of them, the Helvetii, towards Roman territory. Memories of Hannibal and the Cimbri and Teutones had made Romans exceptionally sensitive to any threat of attack from the north and Caesar was able to exploit these sensitivities to the full. It was to be another nine years before he returned to Rome. The Helvetii were defeated in 58 and the remnants of the tribe forced back into what is now Switzerland. Caesar, with general support from the Gaulish tribes, now went north to take on a German tribe, the Suebi, who had spread across the Rhine into Gaul. By the end of 58 they had been pushed back across the Rhine. Caesar was now established in Gaul itself and made no pretence of staying within the provinces allotted him. The lure of further conquest and the plunder and political status that came with it was too strong. Some tribes, the Belgae in the north-west of Gaul, for instance, were provoked by the Roman intrusion and eager to resist. Others were embroiled in rivalries with neighbouring tribes that could be exploited. In his next year of campaigning, 57, Caesar brought virtually the whole of Gaul under Roman control. Back in Rome the news of his victories aroused such enthusiasm that even the senate recognized them, by the granting of fifteen days of public thanksgiving. (It had never given Pompey more than ten.)

In the senate the vote of thanks to Caesar was proposed by none other than Cicero. Cicero had returned from exile in September 57 thanks to the unremitting hard work of Pompey. As Clodius' confidence had grown he had transferred his attentions to the humiliation of Pompey. The restoration of Cicero was one way Pompey could reassert his authority. The senate supported Cicero's return and so, it turned out, did the mass of citizens outside Rome who had no particular reason to warm to Clodius and who favoured the recall of a man who stood for order. So Cicero was greeted with some popular enthusiasm on his arrival although it was clear that he was now in Pompey's debt.

It was now Clodius who had been outmanoeuvred and he resorted to using gangs of his supporters, many of them runaway slaves, to intimidate his enemies. The atmosphere in Rome was vividly described by Cicero in a letter to his friend Atticus in November 57. Cicero was in the process of rebuilding his ransacked house, a move naturally opposed by Clodius.

On 3rd November an armed gang drove the workmen from my site... smashed up my brother's house by throwing stones from my site, and then set it on fire. This was by Clodius' orders... Clodius was running riot even before, but after this frenzy he thinks of nothing but massacring his enemies, and goes from street to street openly offering slaves their freedom.

A rival gang organized by one of the tribunes for 57, Milo, offered some resistance but the effect was simply to escalate the use of violence in a city where the senate had no effective means of keeping order. Unrest was fuelled by shortages of corn, the inevitable result of Clodius' policy of handing it out free. The only man seen as able to resolve the situation was Pompey, and Cicero, in one of his first public appearances since returning from exile, steered the proposal that Pompey be granted the task of restoring corn supplies through the senate, despite widespread opposition from the optimates. However, attempts to give Pompey his own troops for his task failed, and his hopes that he would also be given a command to restore the exiled ruler of Egypt, Ptolemy Auletes, to his kingdom came to nothing. When Pompey failed to reduce the price of corn quickly he also began losing his support among the people.

This was all to Caesar's advantage as it meant that Pompey would remain dependent on his support. It was probably for this reason that in April 56 Pompey agreed to go north to Luca, just inside Caesar's province of Cisalpine Gaul, to meet with Caesar and Crassus to renew their understanding. The agreement made at Luca was that Crassus and Pompey would become the consuls for 55. This would enable them to secure commands to follow their year of office. In return they agreed to use their influence to secure a further command in Gaul for Caesar once his allotted five years were completed in 54. The Luca agreement shows how far the senate had lost the initiative and was at the mercy of those with the commands. For Plutarch, writing 150 years later, this was the moment when individuals became intent on destroying the government. Caesar even sent some of his men 'on leave' to Rome to allow Crassus and Pompey to bully their way into the agreed consulships. There was no pretence of holding an open election. In the other elections for the magistracies feelings ran so high that on one occasion Pompey returned home spattered with blood. Moderates such as Cicero were now completely impotent, simply there to be used by Pompey and Caesar as their mouthpieces. 'What could be more degrading than our present life, especially mine,' Cicero wrote in 55. 'I am regarded as a madman if I say what I ought on public affairs, as a slave if I say what I have to, as a prisoner of war if I say nothing... I am as miserable as you'd expect.' With the senate and the moderates reduced to impotence the stage was set for the last act of republican history.

INTERLUDE 6

Voices from the Republic

Cicero has already been introduced as an orator and as the consul who defeated the conspiracy of Catiline. He was also a man of learning and culture who thought deeply about the political system of Rome. In 55 BC he produced his first literary work, on oratory, and then in 54 began one of his most celebrated works, *De Republica*, a study of the republican state, which now survives only in fragments. It was written as a dialogue set in the 120s and is an exercise in nostalgia, a lament for an idealized past when the various components of the Roman political system, the democratic, aristocratic, and monarchical, existed in harmony.

By the time he was writing Cicero's ideal world was no more. The republic was disintegrating around him and he was acutely sensitive not only to its destruction but to his own deteriorating political position. Much is known of his feelings as some 800 of his letters have survived. They provide an incomparable insight into the period. Cicero's own personality, with its mixture of vanity and self-doubt, a love of peace and books (April 59 BC, 'I have so fallen in love with leisure that I can't be torn away from it. So either I enjoy myself with my books... or I sit counting the waves...') that is set against a yearning for the approval of a public audience, captivates the reader. He is constantly commenting on events and his own, increasingly disillusioned, response to them.

The most frequent recipient of Cicero's surviving letters is his old school friend Atticus, although many letters also survive to Cicero's brother Quintus, and to Brutus, later to be one of the murderers of Caesar. Atticus (the name comes from Atticus' long residence as a young man in Athens) was a wealthy and cultured man who avoided politics and concentrated on his academic interests and his friendships. When he later came to live in Rome he published Cicero's works. Cicero could write to him without reserve, yearning for his company and his advice when the two were separated. In the tense months when civil war broke out in 49 BC (see below, p. 432), Cicero's dependency on his friend becomes all the more acute. He writes in March 49:

I have nothing to write about, having had no news and having replied to all your letters yesterday. But since my distress of mind is such that it is not only impossible to sleep but torment to be awake, I have just started this scrawl without any subject in view, just in order as it were to talk to you, which is my only relief.

Cicero was as much concerned with his own position as with that of the state. He was a republican by temperament, a believer in the ancient liberties of Rome, but

had to admit, even in *De Republica*, that the breakdown of order required a strong man to take control. (Cicero had Pompey in mind.) Yet strong men often act in a tyrannical way, and, in another of his letters to Atticus, Cicero agonizes over what is the proper course to take in these situations. Is it right to risk the future of the state by opposing a tyrant? Is it legitimate to put the safety of oneself and one's family before one's duty to oppose tyranny? What measures can a ruler use to keep order without becoming a tyrant? As Caesar emerged as dictator in the 40s these questions took on a new urgency (see below, pp. 436–8).

Cicero's letters are also remarkable for their accounts of the everyday life of a cultured and leisured man determined to create harmony and good taste around him. Like many of the elite, he had a luxurious villa on the coast in Campania and here Greek culture could be displayed in a way that was still not fully acceptable in a Roman house. He even had two 'Greek' areas, one named after Aristotle's Lyceum and one after Plato's Academy. Getting the ambience right was important to him. He writes to his brother Quintus in 54 BC about progress on a new villa Quintus was building:

At your Manilian place I found Diphilus [the architect] going slow even for Diphilus. Still he had finished everything except the baths, the cloister and the aviary. I liked the house enormously for the dignity of its paved colonnade, which I only realised when I saw the whole length open and the columns polished. It will all depend on the stucco harmonising and I will see to that. The pavement seemed to be getting well laid. I did not care for some of the ceilings, and ordered them to be changed... I admired the topiary work: the ivy has so mantled everything, both the foundation wall and the spaces in the colonnade, that now those Greek statues look as if they were the topiary artists pointing it out for our approval. Again the bathing-place is as cool and mossy as can be... (Translation: L. P. Wilkinson)

Perhaps inevitably, as political and family affairs took their course, Cicero became burdened with his personal disappointments. His marriage to Terentia had begun with passion but the letters to her that survive become less affectionate and more terse over time. He divorced her after many years of marriage when he found her meddling with his money ('my household affairs are in as bad a state as the republic'). There are hints in his letters to Atticus that he found this upheaval deeply upsetting ('at least my daughter [Tullia] and my brother still love me'). Terentia appears to have become jealous of his close affection for Tullia but even Tullia's experiences brought him no happiness. He saw her married three times, the first time to a man of integrity who soon died, the third time to a rake. Then, in 45 BC she died in childbirth. It was a bitter blow, felt even more deeply because politics offered him no relief in that troubled period. His son Marcus also proved a disappointment, ending up with the reputation of the hardest drinker in town. Yet it is also clear from the letters that Cicero himself cannot have been easy to live with. He could be fussy, self-pitying, and ambivalent in his loyalties. At the same time he displays an undoubted, if rather lofty, humanity in his distaste for the slaughter of animals in the shows, in his affection for his freedman, Tiro, who takes down his dictated letters and arranges his books in a new home, and his concern over the deaths of those he loves. Cicero emerges as a fully human individual, one caught in a political

turmoil over which he has no control and of which he eventually becomes a victim (see p. 439), as, tragically, were virtually every one of his sophisticated correspondents.

A complete contrast in tone comes from the poems of another of the 'voices' of the period, Gaius Valerius Catullus (c.84–c.54 BC). Catullus came from a wealthy family in Verona but moved south to join in the literary circles of fashionable Rome. Like any 'modern' poet of the day he was steeped in Greek literature and among his surviving works are translations of Sappho and Callimachus. While drawing heavily on the metres and legends of Greece he was versatile enough to develop a voice which is entirely his own. In his own time he was best known for his erudite and finely crafted poems, such as the short epic 'The Wedding of Peleus and Thetis', which require an understanding of Greek myth to achieve their fullest impact. Here his initial inspiration appears to be the *Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius (see earlier, p. 347) but it is not Jason and Medea he uses as unhappy lovers but Theseus, the hero prince of Athens, and Ariadne, whom Theseus abandons (by tradition on the island of Naxos). There is a powerful and emotive telling of their broken relationship and Ariadne's eventual rescue by Dionysus (magnificently rendered in Titian's masterpiece *Bacchus and Ariadne* (1520–3, now in the National Gallery, London), for which this poem was in itself an inspiration). (See Marilyn Skinner (ed.), *A Companion to Catullus*, Oxford and New York, 2007.)

The modern reader has, however, been attracted by Catullus' record of his experiences in the 'bohemian' circles of late republican Rome. His poems detail the characters that surround him with all their eccentricities, pretensions, and betrayals. The most celebrated is Lesbia, the woman he loved and lost. 'Lesbia' is probably Clodia, the sister of the dissolute Publius Clodius. The affair is detailed from its first rapture to the despair of rejection.

You ask Lesbia, how many kissings of you are enough and to spare for me. As great the number of the sands of Libya to be found in silphium-bearing Cyrene between Jove's torrid oracle and the sacred tomb of legendary Battus; or as many the stars which in the silence of the night behold the stealthy loves of mankind: so many kisses to kiss you would be enough and to spare for love-crazed Catullus, too many for the inquisitive to be able to count or bewitch with their evil tongues.

As he is betrayed he bitterly asks his friends to 'take back to my sweetheart a brief and not kind message. Let her [Lesbia] live and be happy with her lovers, three hundred of whom at once she holds in her embraces, loving none truly but again and again crushing the balls of them all; and let her not count on my love as in the past, for through her fault it has fallen like a flower at the meadow's edge, after being lopped by the passing plough.' (Translations: adapted from T. P. Wiseman.)

This is the world of the sophisticated, the erudite, and the malicious. Catullus is adept at sending off obscenities to those he dislikes. (Even Caesar, who was rumoured to have had a homosexual relationship when young in the east, was the target of a lampoon.) There is also the genuine anguish of an age where personal

relationships have become shallow and transient. These are the private voices of an age of uncertainty.

While Catullus is the poet of volatile relationships and torrid affairs, another poet of the age is known for his detachment from the turmoil of everyday life. This is Titus Lucretius Carus (98–c.55 BC), author of *De Rerum Natura*, ‘On the Nature of Things’, an exuberant portrayal of Epicureanism (see earlier, pp. 351–2). Virtually nothing is known about Lucretius. He was clearly a passionate admirer of Epicurus, and much of *De Rerum Natura* is devoted to praising the man who had freed the human race from superstition and religion and the fear of death. It has been justly said that this is a poem which is hostile to religion but which treats Epicurus with the adulation of a religious convert!

You, who first amidst such thick gloom could raise up so bright
A lantern, bringing everything that's good in life to light
You I follow, Glory of the Greeks, and place my feet
Within your very footsteps...

Lucretius sets out the atomic theory of Epicurus in what has been described as ‘one of the rarest of literary accomplishments, a successful didactic poem on a scientific subject’ (Alexander Dalzell). First, early in his poem, Lucretius derides religion and the power it has to distort moral responsibility. The example he gives is the sacrifice of Iphigenia by her father Agamemnon so that he could be granted fair winds to take his fleet to Troy. (He develops this theme further in Book V, lines 1160ff.) Lucretius provides instead a non-theological explanation for the development of life, with grass and shrubs appearing first and then the first animals from wombs in the earth. He is still in Aristotle’s world of spontaneous generation.

Yet, mechanical though this world appears, even in the early brutish period of humanity’s development there is room for human affection and friendship, one of the cherished beliefs of Epicureanism. There is a continuous tension in *De Rerum Natura* between scientific explanation and an enthusiasm for the natural world that at times comes close to mysticism. Lucretius even goes so far as to hymn the goddess Venus as a creative force of fertility and sensuality. (It has to be remembered that Epicurus believed that the gods did exist but they had nothing to do with human life and could safely be disregarded.) The world is there to celebrate in joy.

And finally, when raindrops are cast down from Father Sky
Into the lap of Mother Earth, they vanish from the eye,
But gleaming crops rise up, and trees put forth green leaves and shoots,
And the trees begin to grow, and weigh their branches down with fruits,
And so we in our turn are nourished, and so the wild brutes—
Hence we see happy cities all abloom with girls and boys,
And the trills of fledgling birds fill up the leafing woods with noise,
And herds and flocks, made sluggish with their fat, lay down their bulk
In rich pastures, their heavy udders oozing with white milk,
And lambs go frolicking across young grass on wobbly legs...

(Book I, lines 250–61)

Lucretius follows the earlier ‘Atomists’ in describing a world that is purely material. Atoms are in continuous movement and always rearranging themselves and, for Lucretius, as with Epicurus, the body and soul are a coherent whole and the soul cannot exist without the living body. This is why one should have no fear of death and why ‘the superstitions and threats of [pagan, of course, in this context] priests’ must be resisted. The soul has no independent existence after death and cannot be punished in any hereafter.

Then Death is nothing to us; it concerns us not a jot,
 Seeing we hold that the mind is mortal. And just as we did not,
 In time gone by, feel anxious when the Carthaginian host
 Swarmed into the fray from every quarter, every coast;
 And the whole world—everything between the sweeping shore
 Of heaven—trembled, shaken by the sickening shock of war,
 ... So when the bond is put asunder between body and soul,
 The two from which we are composed into a single whole,
 Nothing can befall us, we who shall no longer be.

(Book III, lines 830–40)

Later in Book V, Lucretius praises the power of the intellect in using reason to bring, among other fruits, civilization, seamanship, agriculture, law, poetry, painting, and sculpture:

And Reason lifts them up into the boundaries of light.
 For men saw one thing after another clearly in their hearts
 Till they ascended to the very summit of the arts.

(Concluding lines of Book V, all translations:
 A. E. Stallings from the Penguin Classics edition)

Lucretius was a loner in that his individuality lies wholly in the power of his work. He seems to have influenced no one in his own lifetime except a fellow poet, Virgil, who praises him in his *Georgics*, itself a paean to the fertility of the natural world. So Lucretius sank out of view, his materialism hardly in tune with medieval Christian Europe. Later, when a single copy of his work was discovered in a monastery in southern Germany in 1417, Lucretius became of interest again, but this was an age when even those most committed to Renaissance Humanism still saw themselves as Christian, and a hundred years later, his impact remained minimal. It was not until 1580 in the *Essays* of Montaigne that we find a meeting of intellects and then Lucretius was picked up by the seventeenth-century atomists and his influence became pervasive among scientists. (Stephen Greenblatt’s *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*, New York, 2011 or *The Swerve: How the Renaissance Began*, London, 2011, is an exhilarating and elegantly written account of the discovery of the manuscript but comes nowhere near supporting its subtitles. Lucretius only became influential long after the Renaissance was past. ‘The Swerve’ refers to Epicurus’ theory that falling atoms can swerve and so collide with other atoms and form new material objects.)

Caesar and Pompey: The Showdown

Withdrawal into a private world of cultivated friendships was the last thing on the minds of Pompey and Crassus. They both needed to use their consulships of 55 BC as stepping-stones to further commands. Pompey secured one in Spain, for five years. So as not to lose his position in Rome he sent legates to govern Spain on his behalf, something that had never been done before by a governor. He then began raising troops but retained them in Italy on the pretext that they were being trained there for Spain. Meanwhile he kept his name before the public by building a massive theatre, the first stone one to be erected in Rome, in the Campus Martius. Such was the breach in convention involved (no permanent stone theatre had ever been allowed before) that the auditorium had to be built as if it were a glorified annexe to a temple that stood in the centre at the top of the steps. (The site can still be recognized today by the curved row of houses that stand on its foundations.)

In 54 Pompey's wife Julia died in childbirth. It was a shocking blow to Pompey but the death also symbolized the growing distance between Caesar and himself. They were now actively competing against each other for popular support. Alongside Pompey's new theatre in the Campus Martius Caesar began to build a massive voting enclosure in marble while also planning to make a huge extension of the Forum on the north side. He continued to relay reports of his successes to Rome. The year 56 had been spent campaigning through Brittany and along the Atlantic seaboard and Gaul was now quiet enough for him to take the dramatic step in 55 of crossing to Britain, an exploit he repeated in 54. It was a foolhardy adventure that, in 55 in particular, almost ended in disaster when his fleets were destroyed in storms. These setbacks were glossed over in Caesar's deliberately dramatized accounts of his crossing of a distant ocean. They aroused enormous enthusiasm in Rome.

Crassus, unable to compete with these two showmen, now set out on his own quest for military glory. Although nearly 60 and with little experience of command he determined to lead an army to Parthia. There was no immediate reason for war although relations with Parthia had been strained since Pompey had failed to hand over territory he had promised the Parthian king. Crassus led seven legions into the interior. He had some success in 54 in Mesopotamia but in 53, heading east beyond the Euphrates, he allowed his forces to be surrounded by the expert Parthian

archers. Both his cavalry and legionaries were overwhelmed. Plutarch chronicles the horrifying last days of the army as, forced to abandon 4,000 wounded men in the town of Carrhae, it was cut down by the Parthians. Crassus' head was carried off in triumph to be thrown at the feet of the Parthian king. Only a quarter of the original force of 40,000 managed to struggle back to Roman territory.

Carrhae was one of the most humiliating of all Roman defeats and news of the disaster filtered back to Rome at a time of escalating disorder. The political system was in such disarray that in 53 no consuls were elected before July. The elections for 52 were also delayed. In January 52 Clodius and Milo's gangs clashed out on the Appian way. Clodius was wounded, taken to an inn, and there murdered on the orders of Milo. His body was taken to the Forum for the customary speeches and the incensed crowds began raging against Milo. The fire consuming the body got out of hand and the senate house and an adjoining basilica were burnt down.

In the chaos the crowds began calling for Pompey's appointment as dictator. The senate was trapped. If they gave in they would be giving absolute power to one they still feared and distrusted. As a face-saver they devised a formula by which Pompey would become sole consul and he remained so from February 52 until a fellow consul was elected in August. This astonishing breach of convention showed once again how dependent the senate had become on Pompey. Pompey immediately set in hand measures to restore order. Corrupt practices were outlawed and violence curbed. Milo, deserted now by Pompey, was put on trial in 52 for his murder of Clodius. The court was so overawed by Pompey's troops and supporters of Clodius that Cicero, who had agreed to defend Milo, lost his nerve for the first time in his life and only spoke briefly. Milo was forced into exile. (He later wrote to thank Cicero for not using his rhetoric effectively on his behalf. If he had been acquitted he would have missed the chance to enjoy the excellent seafood of Massilia.) Many of Clodius' supporters were also convicted. In 51 elections were resumed according to the normal schedule.

It is possible Pompey might have restored control but there was still Caesar to contend with. Caesar, in fact, had been in trouble. After the first shock of defeat the Gauls had regrouped and recovered their confidence. In 54 an entire Roman legion had been lured from their camp by the Eburones, a northern tribe, and massacred. Caesar had had to borrow a legion from Pompey's forces to replace it as well as recruit two more from Cisalpine Gaul. Unrest among tribes in the north of Gaul had continued into 53 and then in 52 there had been a far more formidable revolt which had covered much of central and south-western Gaul. It had been led by Vercingetorix of the Arverni, the first leader able to transcend tribal loyalties and unite the Gauls in defence of their freedom. Even tribes such as the Aedui who had been allies of the Romans had been drawn in as well as others who had not yet faced Roman forces. Vercingetorix had concentrated on depriving the Romans of food supplies, hoping to isolate them within Gaul so that they could be dealt with more easily. Caesar's leadership skills and the discipline of his legions had been tested to the full before Vercingetorix was brought to bay on a high plateau at Alesia in eastern Gaul. The Romans surrounded the stronghold with several kilometres of ditches

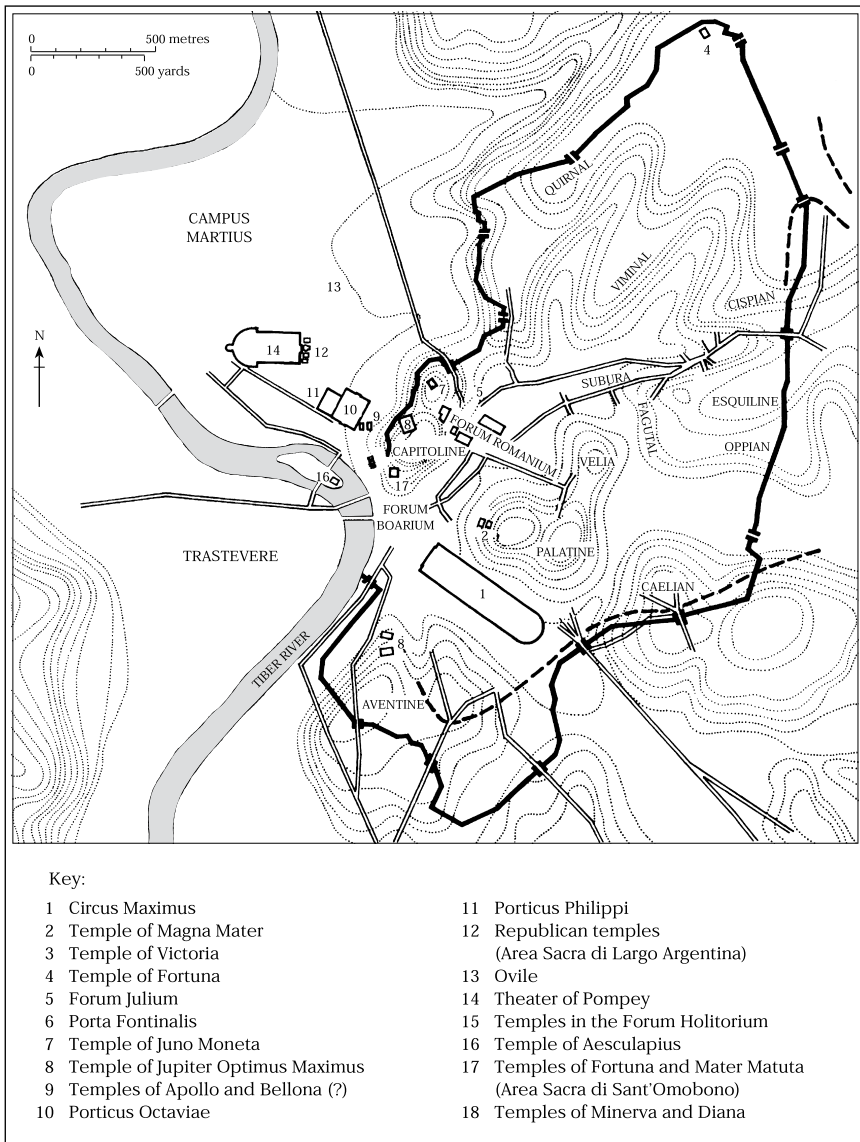
dotted with forts and then fought off a large relieving army. Vercingetorix finally surrendered and was carried off as captive to Rome. (He eventually graced a triumph of Caesar's in 46 and was then strangled.) The year 51 was spent successfully mopping up the remnants of opposition. For the first time the Roman empire had moved beyond the Mediterranean. The new border of the empire in the north was the Rhine and here, despite occasional attempts at further expansion, it was to remain for over 400 years.

It was in 51 that Caesar also published his masterly account of his campaigns, his *Commentaries on the Gallic War*. Told in the third person, they give a vivid picture of the Roman legions in operation and the tribes of Gaul in their final moments before defeat. Caesar, as general, is at the forefront and the account highlights his skills, his calmness, determination, and the speed with which he acted at moments of crisis. There is no doubt that the work was focused on a public audience, but at the same time the simple and lucid prose in which the *Commentaries* are written convince that this is a fairly reliable account of what actually happened on the campaign.

Despite popular acclaim, Caesar remained vulnerable to counter-attack by the optimates. It is not clear, and does not seem to have been even to contemporaries, when his command should have come to an end (the law giving him the command may not have specified a date) but when it eventually did so he would be vulnerable to prosecution unless he could secure another *imperium*, either a command overseas or a consulship. In 50 a political struggle broke out between the optimates who were trying to bring Caesar's command to an end without any renewal and a tribune, Gaius Scribonius Curio, a heavily indebted optimate probably bribed into the support of Caesar, who vetoed any law that threatened him.

Pompey's third consulship had come to an end at the close of 52 although he continued to hold his command in Spain. He seems to have hoped that he could hold the balance between the optimates and Caesar by, in some way, making Caesar dependent on him. However, the time when Caesar would submit to the influence of Pompey was by now long past. After his successes in Gaul it would be below his dignity to accept any relationship with Pompey that was less than one of equality. Pompey seems to have become aware of this during 50 but was confident that in a showdown he would win. In May 50 he had fallen dangerously ill and his recovery was greeted with such apparent enthusiasm that he assumed support from the towns of Italy would not be hard to find. He also received misleading reports that Caesar's armies were on the point of mutiny. His military position was improved when it was decreed that two legions, one from each of Pompey's and Caesar's armies, be sent as a precaution to the Parthian border. Pompey asked Caesar to surrender the legion that he had lent to him in 54 in addition to surrendering one of his own. When news came that the Parthian threat had receded both were retained in Italy and Pompey treated them as his own.

All these moves fuelled the increasing sense of crisis. It was clear that a power struggle was under way—'the greatest struggle that history has ever known', as Cicero put it as he agonized over which side he should take. 'Victory will bring many



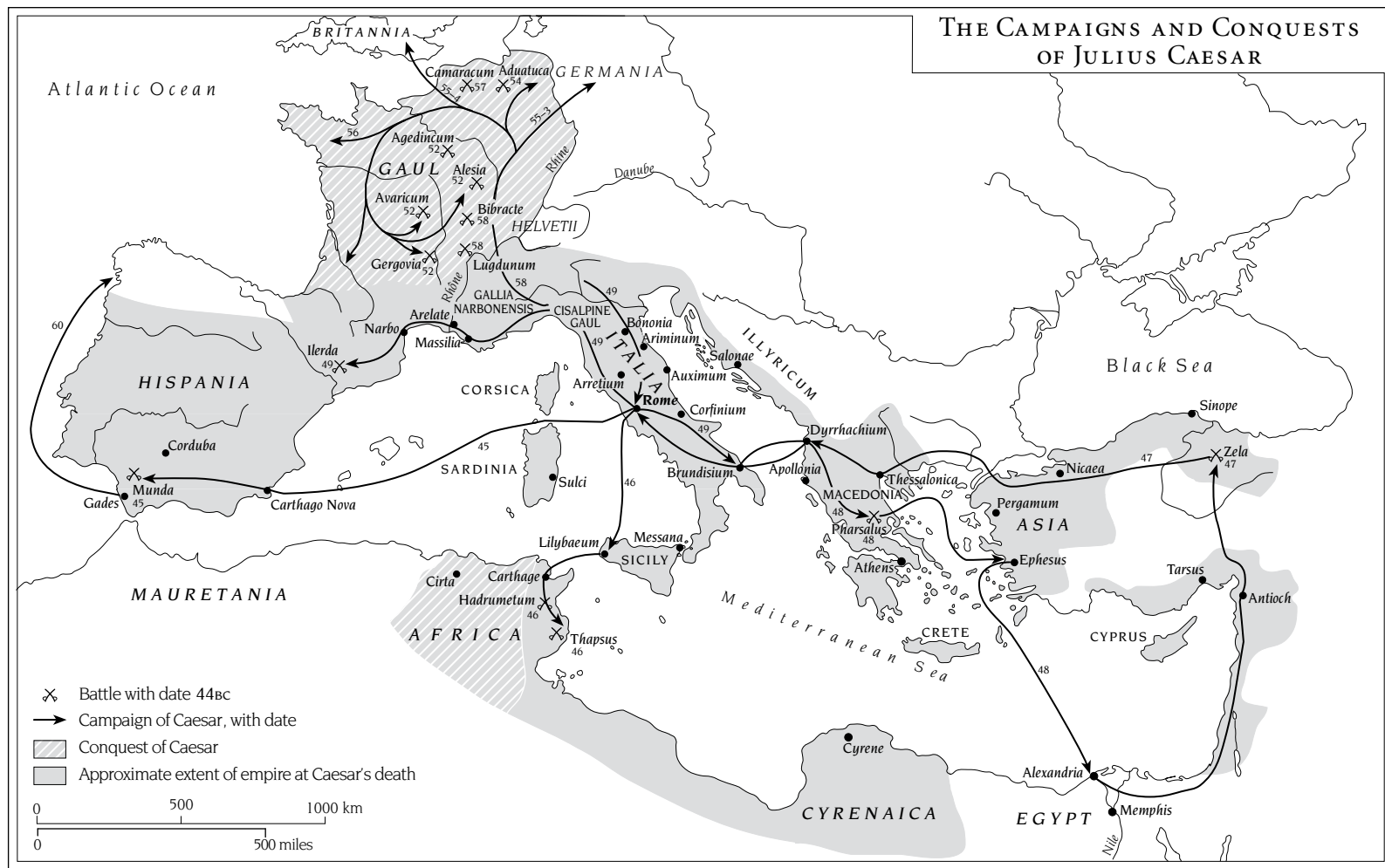
MAP 11 The City of Rome, 52 BC. The centre of popular politics was in the Forum and on the neighbouring Capitoline Hill. In this relatively small area the senate and the concilium plebis met and major law trials were held. One can understand why politics became so volatile in the late republic and why there was such a premium on effective speaking. The Comitia Centuriata held its meetings and elections on the Campus Martius, outside the walls of the city.

evils in its train including the certainty of a despot.' Towards the end of the year Curio, fearful of what would happen to him when he stopped being tribune, proposed that both Caesar and Pompey should surrender their commands. The motion was passed by the *concilium* with an overwhelming majority but no date for the surrender was set. By the end of the year rumours were circulating that Caesar was about to march on Rome, and in December 50, the consuls, on their own initiative, approached Pompey to ask whether he would save the city against Caesar. He accepted in what was now an alliance with the optimates in defence of the republic. On 1 January 49 Caesar suggested in a letter to the senate that both he and Pompey should lay down their commands. The optimates, now in league with Pompey, would not agree and tried, against opposition from tribunes friendly to Caesar, to get his armies (and his alone) disbanded. On the 7th the senate passed a *senatus consultum ultimum*, the emergency decree calling all magistrates to defend the city. If he was to preserve his dignity Caesar was now left with little choice but to take the initiative. On 10 January 49 he crossed a small river, the Rubicon, which marked the boundary of Cisalpine Gaul within which he could exercise *imperium* and the rest of Italy where he could not. He had, in effect, declared war on the republic. (Tom Holland's *Rubicon: The Last Years of the Roman Republic*, London, 2003; New York, 2004, provides a fast-paced popular account of these tumultuous years. A more sober approach, emphasizing the durability of republican institutions, is Erich Gruen, *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic*, Berkeley and London, 1974.)

The Civil War

Once Caesar had taken the initiative there was no reason to delay. The defenders of the republic could call on the two legions in Italy and then on a further seven in Spain where Pompey still had a legitimate command. Caesar had to seize Italy before these could be brought home. As he marched south he found little opposition. After all the disruptions of the previous years the mood was one of apathy and Pompey and his supporters were horrified to find that there was no uprising in their favour. In March the consuls, Pompey, and the republican army managed to leave Italy. Strategically, but perhaps not psychologically, it was the right move. Pompey's strengths lay not only in the east (where he had grateful clients from his campaigns of the 60s) but in his command in Spain, and in the provinces of Sicily and Africa which were controlled by optimist supporters. His best hope was to stretch Caesar's resources and communications to breaking point.

In the event Pompey lasted little more than eighteen months. The summer of 49 was spent by Caesar eliminating Pompey's armies in Spain and this important success was followed by the submission of Sicily and Sardinia. A major setback took place, however, in Africa. Here Curio, Caesar's bribed tribune from the year 50, was sent with four legions. He found himself facing not only the local Pompeian commander but king Juba of Numidia. It was the king who lured the inexperienced and impetuous Curio into the desert on the pretence that the Numidian forces were in



MAP 12

retreat. Curio was killed in the counter-attack and most of his army destroyed: Africa, for the time being, was lost to Caesar.

It was a direct confrontation with Pompey, now training up his legions and cavalry in Macedonia, which was important. Here Caesar's emphasis on speed and surprise paid off. The Adriatic was well guarded by Pompey's fleet (which was led by Caesar's old adversary Bibulus) but Caesar shipped 20,000 legionaries and 600 cavalry across to Epirus in the middle of winter and escaped capture. It was a risky operation particularly as there would be little food to feed the troops in Greece and it nearly ended in disaster two months later when Pompey, attempting to break through fortifications which Caesar had erected between him and his naval base, Dyrrachium, inflicted heavy casualties on Caesar's smaller army. It took all Caesar's formidable powers of leadership to regroup his forces and finally bring Pompey to bay at Pharsalus in northern Greece in August. Although he was outnumbered by 47,000 to 24,000, Caesar inflicted a crushing defeat on Pompey. Fifteen thousand of Pompey's men died, another 24,000 were captured. Pompey fled, first to Lesbos, where his wife and younger son Sextus were sheltering, and then with them on to Egypt. Pompey must have hoped for some support there as the people of Rome had been made guardian of the young Egyptian king Ptolemy XIII by Ptolemy's father, who owed some gratitude to Rome for having restored him to his throne in 55. However, as he stepped ashore he was murdered on the orders of the Egyptian authorities, who understood that Caesar was now the man to please. When Caesar arrived a short time afterwards he was presented with Pompey's head, embalmed. He was sensitive enough to weep at the sight.

For seven months Caesar stayed in Egypt. It was still an independent kingdom ruled, in theory, jointly by a 21-year-old queen, Cleopatra, and her brother, the 15-year-old Ptolemy XII, but the two had fallen out. At the time Ptolemy and his courtiers and generals had the upper hand over Cleopatra, who had been forced to flee to Syria to raise troops against him. She was, however, a formidable rival. The surviving portraits of her do not confirm her as a conventional beauty but she must have had both charisma and intelligence. She was the first Hellenistic ruler of Egypt to have learnt the language (it was said that she knew nine altogether) and to have participated in Egyptian religious festivals. She grasped where her chances lay, and when Caesar boldly installed himself in the royal palace in Alexandria, she smuggled herself in wrapped in a rug. She was soon his lover. Together Caesar and Cleopatra withstood a siege by Ptolemy's supporters (it was then that Caesar, trying to destroy his opponents' ships, succeeded in burning down part of the famous library of Alexandria) and when he was relieved by troops from Syria Caesar managed to defeat Ptolemy and install Cleopatra as sole ruler. There are legends of them cruising the Nile together and she claimed a boy born to her later as Caesar's son. He was named Caesarion. (Amongst the gush and poorly written biographies of Cleopatra, go for Joyce Tyldesley's *Cleopatra: Last Queen of Egypt*, London, 2008. Lucy Hughes-Hallett, *Cleopatra: History, Dreams and Distortions*, London, 1991, is a fascinating look at the way Cleopatra has been interpreted over the ages.)

However, the civil war was not yet over. By April 47 Caesar was on the move again. He returned to Italy via Asia Minor where, in one of the easiest victories of his career, at Zela in Pontus, he crushed an army led by Pharnaces, a son of Mithridates. ('I came, I saw, I conquered,' as he succinctly put it.) Pompey's Adriatic fleet had also been eliminated. Caesar paused in Rome and then set out in late 47 to Africa, still resolutely held by supporters of Pompey and the old senatorial order. The troops gathered there were commanded by Quintus Metellus Scipio, last survivor of one of the noblest Roman families, and Titus Labienus, an officer of Caesar's who, though trusted throughout the Gallic War, had thrown in his lot with Pompey in 49. With them was Cato of Utica, who personified the old conservative Rome that Caesar was now in the process of destroying. Again it was a brilliant campaign. Caesar faced immense logistical problems in landing a force large enough to take on the fourteen legions awaiting him, but as he gathered strength (he received some support from descendants of the veterans of Marius' armies) he rounded on his enemies and the final battle at Thapsus in April 46 was a massacre. Cato committed suicide, becoming in the process a hallowed martyr of a vanishing world. Plutarch describes the nobility of his death in detail and it haunted later generations (including some of the Founding Fathers of the United States). Scipio also committed suicide when facing capture as he escaped westwards to Spain. Labienus actually reached Spain, where, with one of Pompey's sons, Gnaeus, he mounted a last stand. Caesar arrived in late 46 for a short but savage campaign that ended in the Battle of Munda (March 45), a hard-won victory that led to the deaths of both Labienus and Gnaeus. The old order was dead.

Caesar and the Search for a Political Solution

Caesar's thoughts now had to turn to a political settlement. He had paid brief visits to Rome during the civil wars and as his dominance over the empire grew he had assumed greater political powers. In 49 he had himself established as dictator and used the power of the post to ensure he achieved the consulship of 48, the consulship he had always intended to hold. He also held a dictatorship for short periods before the office was given to him for a period of ten years in 46 and for life in 44. This was a clear breach of convention—the post was designed only to be held for a short period during an emergency—but now Caesar acquired on a permanent basis all its powers, which included the right to overrule all other magistrates and to have immunity from the vetoes of the tribunes. In 46 he was again made consul and never surrendered the post. He remained *pontifex maximus* and strengthened his influence over Roman religious life by becoming an augur (one of those responsible for divination) in 47.

The powers of 46 were granted by an enthusiastic if obsequious senate after the news of the victory at Thapsus had reached Rome. Caesar was awarded no less than four triumphs. The fact that he had won a civil war against fellow citizens was concealed by allocating each triumph to a victory over foreigners, the Gauls, the

Egyptians, Pharnaces, and king Juba of Numidia. They were held with appropriate splendour in September 46. The celebrations ended with gladiatorial games (as gladiators could only fight in honour of the dead the games were dedicated to the memory of Julia) and the opening of the magnificent new basilica and forum that Caesar had been building since 54. Each citizen was granted a cash handout together with a special issue of grain and oil.

Caesar was, in fact, acquiring the aura of a Hellenistic monarch although he was careful to scotch any attempts to make him divine or to allow the charged word *rex*, king, to be used of him. The question remained whether he could sustain this new role, eliminate the old order completely, and stabilize the state. He did set about tackling some of the abuses and tensions of society. A system for the fair settlement of debts had been decreed in 48. Disorder in Rome was curbed by banning the *collegia* and the problem of the poor tackled by reducing the number of families eligible for free corn. At the same time new colonies were set up overseas. Some 80,000 citizens were persuaded to emigrate, forming permanent centres of Roman culture in the provinces. Citizenship was also granted to loyal provincial communities. Taxes in the provinces were to be collected directly, no longer through tax farmers, and measures were taken to eliminate the bribery of juries. The traditional Roman calendar, which was made up of a year of 355 days, with an extra month of 22 or 23 days added every other year, was replaced on the advice of an Alexandrian astronomer, Sosigenes, by one of 365 days with one extra day added every four years. (This calendar lasted until it required further reform in the sixteenth century.)

None of this solved the crucial issue of Caesar's position within the state. It seemed to be becoming increasingly absolutist, and opposition began to grow, particularly among the noble families of the senate who saw the house packed with those Caesar wished to reward, many of them army officers or provincials. The changing mood towards Caesar can be seen through the eyes of Cicero. He had agonized over which side to take in the civil war and had then chosen Pompey's. Once Pompey had been defeated he threw himself on the mercy of Caesar, who treated him with the clemency and consideration that remained one of his most attractive qualities. Cicero had hoped against hope that Caesar's rule might lead at last to the stable and united republic of which he had dreamed. In a speech in the senate in late 46 he praised Caesar for his generosity and ability to bring reconciliation to the state. Yet, although he never lost an admiration for Caesar as a man, he inevitably became disillusioned with the stifling of political life as Caesar's behaviour became more overtly monarchical. After his daughter Tullia died he shared his despair in a moving letter to his friend Servius Sulpicius:

Now I cannot escape from the sorrow of my home into public affairs, and find anything in them to console me, whereas before I always had a place at home to cheer me up when I came home depressed from public life. So I'm not at home, and I'm not in public life; my home cannot console me for the sorrow I feel for the free Republic, nor can public life compensate for the grief I feel at home. (Translation: Elizabeth Rawson)

Fortunately Cicero's intellectual powers remained intact. In his distress he set himself the task of presenting the fruits of Greek philosophy in Latin for an audience that could not read Greek for itself. There was a sense of mission here, of bringing Greek culture to Rome. 'Greek literature is read in nearly every nation, but Latin only within its own boundaries, and those, we must grant, are narrow,' as he told his readers. There was also a personal motive, seen in one lost work, *Consolatio*, of trying to come to terms with his grief by exploring his emotions through the similar experiences of others. These final works of his life tackled epistemology (*Academica*), the ultimate aim of life (*De Finibus*), the nature of the gods (*De Natura Deorum*), and moral philosophy (*De Officiis*), with shorter works on friendship and old age. Many concepts proved untranslatable into Latin and so Cicero had to coin words to express them. Words such as 'quality', 'essence', and 'moral' (*qualitas*, *essentia*, and *moralis*) all appear for the first time. In these works Cicero's prose achieved a range and precision that made it a model for those who came after him. He was the hero of the Italian Humanists (see further Chapter 36).

In his exposition of philosophy Cicero adopted a tone of intellectual detachment. He never attempted to be original and his approach was sceptical. He believed in countering superstition by reason yet at the same time doubted whether there was such a thing as certainty. Insofar as he warmed to any school of philosophy it was to Stoicism with its emphasis on endurance and commitment to public life for the good of all. While he was prepared to believe in some form of divine being, Cicero felt that the traditional gods of Rome and the variety of new gods which were entering Rome from Egypt and the east were no more than human creations, attractive only to the credulous. What he would never question was the central place that religious ritual occupied in Roman life; it was as much part of it as the clamour of political activity in the Forum.

For the final months of Caesar's life Cicero was absent from public life. Although there were claims that he was involved in the plot to kill Caesar there is no direct evidence for it. The plot was hatched at a time when Caesar's future ambitions were arousing increasing concern. The senate continued to pile honours on him, the dictatorship for life, the renaming of the month Quinctilis after him (it survives today in English as July), a gilded chair and triumphal robe for his public appearances. At one festivity a crown was placed on Caesar's knees. Caesar's fellow consul for the year, Marcus Antonius (Mark Antony), attempted to place it on his head but Caesar threw it into the crowd. He may simply have become irritated by the ceremonies of public life. When a delegation from the senate approached him with the offer of new honours he did not even stand up. By early 44 his energies were being taken up by the more congenial task of planning a major campaign in the east.

It is hard to know how Caesar saw his own position and whether he had any clear concept of himself as ruler. In his last months he seems to have been attracted to the idea of himself as divine (as Alexander was). In the east he was already accepted as a god ('descended from Ares and Aphrodite', as one acclamation from Asia put it). There was nothing unusual in this, but things seem to have been taken further than usual in Rome when Caesar accepted the idea of a temple dedicated to him and the

appointment of Mark Antony as his *flamen* or priest. More provocative to the average Roman were the accumulation of honours and trappings that hinted of kingship. Here Caesar's behaviour was deeply ambiguous. Some have argued that more public enthusiasm for the idea would have encouraged him to declare himself as king, others that he never intended to challenge the most sacred concept of republicanism, that of freedom from royal tyranny. It may have been that he felt himself trapped between rival expectations and that the planned trip to the east was an attempt to escape the impasse.

For many of the noble elite, however, the notion of *libertas* was one that was sacrosanct. It proved a powerful rallying call even if it did not offer a clear alternative for political stability. A varied group of conspirators were inspired by it. There were committed republicans such as Cassius and Brutus, the leaders, both former supporters of Pompey whom Caesar had forgiven, and others with more personal resentments. The secret was well kept. Caesar was due to attend a meeting of the senate in a great hall adjoining Pompey's theatre. One of the conspirators was delegated to throw himself at Caesar's feet with a petition, pulling Caesar's toga downwards so he could not defend himself. The others were then to stab him. On 15 March 44, three days before Caesar was due to leave on campaign, the murder took place as planned. Caesar fell bleeding to death at the foot of a statue of Pompey. (His body was burnt in the Forum and flowers, left by unknown admirers, are still to be found today on the supposed spot of the cremation.)

The Aftermath of Caesar

The conspirators claimed that they had killed Caesar in the cause of republican liberty. It now became clear that what they meant was the liberty of the optimates, a concept that had long since forfeited popular support. The crowds did not rise in support of the conspirators and they were forced to take refuge on the Capitoline Hill and then hammer out a compromise with the surviving consul Mark Antony and supporters of Caesar. The dictatorship was abolished and the murderers given an amnesty, but in return all Caesar's acts were confirmed and there would be no prosecutions for activities in the civil war. Cicero emerged to preside over the reconciliation. However, when it was discovered that Caesar had left his gardens to the city and a sum of money to each of its citizens, popular fury against the murderers grew and Brutus and Cassius were forced to leave Rome. Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* remains an unforgettable re-creation of the drama.

It was Antony, with the support of Lepidus, Caesar's Master of the Horse, who now held the initiative. To his dismay Antony found that Caesar had adopted his 18-year-old nephew Octavian as his son and heir, and Octavian, despite family pressure to keep out of politics, arrived in Rome to claim his inheritance. He soon began appealing for troops to join him, with some success. It was Cicero, once again leaving his writing desk, who now came forward to play his final role in Roman politics. He flattered himself that he could woo Octavian and use him against the growing

power of Antony, who had secured a command in Transalpine and Cisalpine Gaul to follow his consulship. In the senate Cicero launched into a series of speeches against Antony that he called his *Philippics* after the great speeches of his hero Demosthenes against Philip of Macedon (see p. 312). His plot was to send the new consuls and Octavian, with a special command, against Antony.

The plan backfired. Antony was indeed defeated in Cisalpine Gaul but both consuls were killed and Octavian found himself commander of an army of eight legions. These he refused to give up and marched to Rome to demand and receive a consulship from the humiliated senate. He was aged 19. He now threw off the patronage of his elders and marched north on his own initiative to meet Antony and Lepidus. Between them they could muster forty-five legions and so there could be no argument when in November 43 they set up a triumvirate, a government of three. The west of the empire was divided between them and they took on the responsibility of making laws and appointing magistrates. This liquidation of the republic was ratified by a meeting of the *concilium* held in a Forum ringed by troops. The senate, by allowing Octavian to raise his own troops and then recognizing him as a consul, had once again helped bring about its own demise.

There was a nasty aftermath. All three of the new rulers owed their position to Caesar and they now took the opportunity to rid themselves of Caesar's and their own enemies. It was important to them to seize land in Italy to settle their large armies. A death list of 300 senators and 2,000 equestrians was drawn up. There was only one name of consular rank, Cicero. He hesitated over his escape and was caught in his litter and beheaded. The final scene is recorded by Plutarch in one of the most evocative passages of his *Lives*. (The approaching end is signalled by a flock of crows cawing around Cicero.) In a grisly aftermath Antony ordered the hands that had written the *Philippics* to be hacked off and nailed alongside Cicero's head on the speaker's rostrum in the Forum. It was a grotesque end to Rome's greatest orator and one of the founding figures of European liberal Humanism.

Lepidus was now left to keep order in Italy while Octavian and Antony headed east. Their quarry was Brutus and Cassius to whom the senate had given commands in Macedonia and Syria in 43. They had acquired a total of nineteen legions between them but these proved no match for the larger forces of the triumvirate. At successive battles at Philippi in Greece in the autumn of 42 they were defeated by Antony and both committed suicide. (Octavian played very little part in the battle and was haunted for years to come by taunts of cowardice.) The only focus of opposition to the triumvirs was now Pompey's son Sextus Pompeius, who was based with a fleet on Sicily where he styled himself 'the son of Neptune'.

He was not the only one to claim divine inheritance. In January 42 the senate had recognized Caesar as a god. After his death a cult had sprung up focused on the spot where his body was burned and the appearance of a comet confirmed to those who wished to believe that a new god had arrived in the heavens. Octavian eagerly appropriated his father's status and from now on called himself *divi filius*, 'the son of a god'.

There was no love lost between the triumvirs. Lepidus was soon pushed aside. Antony tried to outmanoeuvre Octavian by allocating him the west of the empire

where he would have the unpopular task of settling veterans in Italy and dealing with Sextus. When Octavian simply confiscated the land he needed and wiped out his opponents, Antony reacted and attempted to land in Italy. The two would have fought each other in 40 if their armies had not been so sick of war. At Brundisium in September 40 they agreed on a new division of the empire. Octavian was to take the west of the empire, from Illyricum westwards, while from Macedonia to the east was to stay with Antony. Lepidus was to remain in the triumvirate with a command in Africa. The agreement brought universal relief. In his fourth *Eclogue* the poet Virgil talked of a new era of peace that would be consolidated by the birth of a young child. Later Christian writers argued that this was Christ but Virgil probably meant the expected child of Mark Antony and his wife Octavia, the sister of Octavian.

The third member of the triumvirate, Lepidus, did not last long. In 36 he was involved in the final defeat of Sextus Pompeius in Sicily but unwisely then made an attempt to challenge Octavian, whose own part in the fighting had been less successful. His troops simply melted away at Octavian's approach and he was forced to capitulate. Octavian, in merciful mood, confirmed him in his office of *pontifex maximus* that he had been awarded on Caesar's death and Lepidus lived out the remaining twenty-four years of his life quietly in Africa.

Antony versus Octavian: The Final Struggle of the Republic

In the early 30s both Antony and Octavian were preoccupied with the consolidation of their rule. Although Octavian had been as guilty as anyone of bringing disruption to Italy he now sought to portray himself as a man of peace wedded to the restoration of traditional Roman values. His background as the son of a wealthy landowner from the town of Velitrae in the Alban Hills equipped him to understand the needs of provincial Italy and the deep longing there was for stability but he also showed himself an adept propagandist. He associated himself with the god Apollo, the god of reason and order. One of the symbols of Apollo was a snake and rumours spread as to how Octavian's mother had been impregnated by one (like Olympias, the mother of Alexander). Octavian's comparatively modest house on the Palatine, now rediscovered, was attached to an imposing temple to the god.

By fostering traditional Roman values Octavian was implicitly condemning the influence over Rome of the east. Here Antony played into his hands. When Antony had assumed command in the east after Philippi he had worked hard to restore order among the client states of the empire. One of these was Egypt, and so Cleopatra, who had strengthened her position by murdering her younger brother and placing the 4-year-old Caesarion as co-ruler in his place, was summoned to Antony in 41. She upstaged him by appearing in a magnificent barge, weighted with gold and suffused with the perfumes of the Orient. (The vivid description of her arrival in Plutarch's life of Antony proved a direct inspiration for Shakespeare in his *Antony and Cleopatra*.) Antony, who, in contrast to the austere Caesar, had a weakness for

opulence, succumbed. He spent the winter of 41 with Cleopatra in Alexandria and she bore him twins. It is impossible to disentangle the components of their relationship. Undoubtedly it depended partly on the exotic setting of their romance and sexual attraction, but Antony certainly had his eye on the wealth of Egypt as well. For Cleopatra Roman support was essential if her kingdom was to survive, and she was prepared to grant her favours to the strong man of the day. (Whatever the bond between the two, it was not indissoluble. The couple spent four years apart between 40 and 36, a period when Antony was married to Octavian's sister, Octavia.)

The major threat to the stability of the eastern empire now came from Parthia, the only well-organized state on its borders. In 39 Parthian forces invaded Syria and even entered Jerusalem. They were repulsed. Antony, who had sent Octavia home when she had become pregnant and renewed his relationship with Cleopatra, now planned a major invasion of Parthia. It was launched in 36 and ended in disaster. Antony was forced to withdraw his forces with the loss of 22,000 legionaries, a third of his men.

Little help could be expected from Octavian and from now on Antony was increasingly dependent on Cleopatra. In 34 the lovers staged a great ceremony in Alexandria. They sat together on a pair of golden thrones with Cleopatra robed as the goddess Isis. Caesarion was declared the true heir of Caesar (an obvious affront to Octavian) and, with his mother, joint ruler of Egypt and Cyprus. Antony had already granted Cleopatra the rich timber-bearing coastline of Cilicia. (Egypt was as short of timber as it had been 2,000 years before.) Their three children, the twins and a son now 2 years old, were each proclaimed rulers of eastern provinces. Antony claimed no royal powers for himself, but when the news of the ceremony reached Rome in 33 it was easy for Octavian to damn him as the plaything of a powerful woman who was corrupting Roman virtues with the decadence of the east. Octavian unscrupulously published Antony's will showing that he wanted to be buried with Cleopatra in Alexandria. To stress the contrast he put in hand a vast mausoleum for himself that dominated the approach into Rome whether by river or along the Via Flaminia. (It survives in a much dilapidated state.) Although Antony retained some support in Rome, Octavian was winning the propaganda battle. Antony too had associated himself with a god, Dionysus. Dionysus was acceptable as a role model for a ruler in the east but in Rome he was seen only as a god of indiscipline and decadence and Octavian played on the connotations. The campaign paid off. A swell of support for Octavian in provincial Italy gave him the *auctoritas*, the status, to cancel the consulship promised to Antony for 31. When Cleopatra now crossed with Antony to Greece, the move could be sold as an invasion of the empire to which Octavian as consul himself for the year must respond.

The final act was in many ways an anticlimax. Both Antony and Octavian mustered vast forces. Antony had thirty legions and 500 ships, Octavian a fleet of 400. They met at Actium, a cape on the western coast of northern Greece. Octavian's forces managed to cut Antony off from the Peloponnese and Antony was reduced to trying to break out with his fleet. When the breakout failed he and Cleopatra abandoned their forces and fled to Egypt. Octavian was able to take the surrender of both army and navy. A year later Octavian arrived in Egypt, and seized

Alexandria and the treasures of the Ptolemies. In one of the more memorable death scenes of history (Plutarch once again excels himself) Antony stabbed himself, while Cleopatra had herself bitten by an asp. Caesarion was later murdered. Egypt, the last of the great Hellenistic kingdoms, was now in the hands of Rome. At last, wrote the poet Horace in one of his *Odes*, the time for drinking and dancing had come. Octavian celebrated his victory by creating a vast monument overlooking the sea at Actium whose fragments, with reliefs of his triumph in Rome, have only recently (in the 1990s) been excavated.

Why did the Republic Collapse?

Politically the most successful years of the republic had been those when the senate's authority had been respected and deferred to by the other participants in the Roman political system. In the third and early second centuries BC it had maintained an aura of competence and stability and, although its legal powers were limited, it had dominated the decision-making process. Unfortunately the senate's aura was easily dissipated through its own incompetence and political clumsiness. The growth of the empire with its demands for good administration and effective defence had led to rising social tensions at home, between rich and poor, Romans and allies. Here was a variety of challenges that the body had proved unable to meet. The Gracchi, for instance, had been met with nothing more visionary than violence. At the same time, and crucially, the senate did not have a monopoly of coercive power and was thus vulnerable to those who did, the elected consuls and praetors during their term of office and afterwards if their commands were prolonged. When outsiders, such as Pompey, also acquired commands, the senate was rendered impotent. It survived because the conventions of the constitution remained astonishingly powerful. When the crunch came Pompey did not overthrow senatorial government even though he undoubtedly had the power to do so.

In the 50s, however, the constitutional conventions came under renewed strains. The people had never been quiescent in the state, their assemblies passed all legislation, and the electorate, in effect all citizens who could reach Rome, chose the chief magistrates. However, now an enlarged and volatile urban population (with the allies added as voters after 90 BC) offered opportunities for unscrupulous manipulators such as Clodius to engineer popular unrest. The assemblies were rowdy places and the people could easily be flattered or disturbed by the attention they were given. Although this was hardly a democracy in the sense of that known in Athens, the crowd became more excitable as respect for the senate diminished. The senate, now increasingly marginal to events, had to rely on its former enemy Pompey to defend it not only against street disorder but also against the ambitions of Caesar who had manipulated populist unrest to his advantage ever since the beginning of his career. (The story has been well told by Fergus Millar, notably in *The Crowd in Rome in the Late Republic* (Ann Arbor, 2002), who has stressed the

restricted space in central Rome in which the different assemblies, including the senate, clustered, each watching the other's activities.)

Ultimately he who dared won. Caesar could argue that he was only defending his threatened dignity (his *honor*) as a Roman when he crossed the Rubicon. However, he had used his magistracies and commands to achieve a political supremacy whose logical end, if he triumphed over his enemies, was dictatorship. What kind of dictatorship perhaps even Caesar did not know, so powerfully did the heritage of republican liberty limit the possibilities of one-man rule. In the event Caesar failed to replace the republic with an alternative, while his acclaimed quality of clemency left his enemies and those who still cared for 'liberty' at large. His assassination was the result and it was followed, inevitably, by a new power struggle. The old republican concept of *libertas* was challenged on the battlefields of Philippi and from then on there was only a struggle between competing dynasts. The winner of this, Octavian, now promised that he had no other interest than the restoration of the republic whose institutions and conventions still survived. It was a promise that a shattered senate and a weary people were ready to accept.

INTERLUDE 7

Women in the Roman Republic

The Romans of the late republic preserved an idealistic picture of early Rome with life centred on steady toil in the fields, piety to the gods, and loyalty to the state in peace and war. There was also an ideal of womanhood. Women, in their role as the wives of farmers and soldiers, were expected to be industrious and frugal home-keepers, the mothers of future citizens. Most valued was the virtue of *pudicitia*, a word that had connotations both of fidelity and fertility. The *univira*, the woman who had slept only with her husband and never remarried after his death, was the sexual ideal, encapsulated perhaps in Lucretia, who, raped by the son of the last of the Roman kings, killed herself rather than live with the dishonour of providing an unchaste example to others. Absolute loyalty to their menfolk was also expected. The women of the neighbouring Sabine tribe served as the ideal here. They had been forcibly carried off as wives by Romans but when, in the next campaigning season, their kinsfolk tried to rescue them, they appeared, now clutching their 'Roman' babies, to reconcile the invaders. Generally the Romans, like the Etruscans, had a much more relaxed attitude towards the appearance of women in public than the Greeks did. Women could eat with their husbands and even preside over meals at which both sexes were present.

Shortly after the shock of the devastating defeat of the Roman armies at Cannae (earlier, pp. 385–6), the Oppian Law was passed. It forbade flamboyant display for women, and this specifically included parading themselves in carriages. The need for the law is evidence that, with so many men absent from Rome, or killed in battle, women were becoming more socially venturesome. Those from the elite were creating social networks among themselves and there are accounts they would meet to make ritual sacrifices for the good of the state. At first the new law appears to have been respected, but when the Punic War ended in victory (201) and husbands began returning home, tensions grew. There seemed no reason for any continuing restraint. In 195, there was an extraordinary demonstration by women against the Oppian Law. They blockaded the streets and the entrance to the Forum claiming that the wealth of the republic was increasing every day and they should be able to share in it.

It was the elder Cato, consul in that year, who emerged to uphold the values of traditional Roman womanhood against what, as ever, he saw as the pernicious influences of the east. Luxurious living, he blustered, was breaking down the discipline that was needed to keep the women in check. Women's 'unbridled natures'

would always be beyond satisfaction and he mocked the men who were so ready to give in to their demands. His opponents argued that it was fitting that the heroes of Rome's wars should set their wives up in state, as a glittering appendage to their own status. The Oppian Law was repealed and the women celebrated with a new procession in which they appeared in all their finery.

Displays of opulence now became common. Polybius has left an account of the lifestyle of Aemilia, the widow of the great Scipio Africanus:

When Aemilia had left her house to take part in women's processions, it had been her habit to appear in great state, as befitted a woman who had shared in the life of the great Africanus when he was at the height of his success. Apart from the magnificence of her personal attire and the decoration of her carriage, all the baskets, cups, and sacrificial vessels or utensils were made of gold or silver, and were carried in her train on such ceremonial occasions, while the retinue of maids and menservants who accompanied her was proportionately large. (Translation: I. Scott-Kilvert)

So emerges the strong independent woman, of whom Cornelia, the daughter of Scipio Africanus and Aemilia, and mother of the Gracchi, is a prime example (see earlier, p. 400). By the first century a few aristocratic women were also well educated. Of Cornelia, the (fifth) wife of Pompey, it was said (by Plutarch): 'The young woman had many attractive qualities, quite apart from her youth and beauty. She had a solid knowledge of literature, of playing the lyre, and of geometry, and she was a regular and intelligent listener to lectures on philosophy.'

The shift in attitude was mirrored by changes in marriage customs. There was never any pretence that romance played much part in the making of a marriage that, in aristocratic circles, normally saw an older man, perhaps in his late twenties, being joined to a girl who had just reached puberty. Political considerations were important, with families using their marriage links to sustain alliances. The marriage of Pompey with Caesar's daughter Julia is an obvious example and it is good to report that it developed into a genuine love match—one ending tragically, however, when Julia died in childbirth in 54 BC. A major purpose of marriage was to produce male heirs who could extend the family line and, according to Lucretius, the committed wife was expected to lie still during sexual intercourse as this was the best way to ensure conception. The achievement of a pregnancy came before sexual pleasure. Prostitutes, who did not want to conceive in any case, could be more forward in their love-making, says Lucretius, and they and their partners were assumed to enjoy it more.

In Rome's early history the most common form of marriage was *in manus*. Here the father of the bride transferred her, with her dowry, into the hand (*manus*) of her husband's family and abdicated all responsibility for her. It is probable that in early times the dowry was in land that would be added to the husband's plot that the family would then work together. If the husband died his widow and any children would inherit the plot intact and their livelihood was preserved. An alternative way of marriage, *sine manu*, allowed the wife to retain membership of her own family, and thus the right to any inheritance due to her from it, even though married into another. Her husband no longer had formal control over her. By the first century

BC, for reasons that are not wholly clear, this had become the most popular form of marriage. Although the woman retained a *tutor*, a member of her family who was responsible for her affairs, she had some independence in the management of her business. She could carry out cash transactions, own property, and accept inheritances.

Women also retained some control over their dowries. A husband was expected to keep it intact and could even be sued by his wife if she suspected it was being put at risk by his financial misdealing. At his death it was returned to her, even if it meant the estate had to be broken up to extract it. On her death it was the convention that the dowry would pass down to the children. The dowry would even be repaid in cases of divorce and Cicero, divorcing his wife Terentia, found himself financially embarrassed at having to do so. He promptly married a very young and rich girl, Publilia, but this marriage also ended in divorce. By the first century BC divorce had become common and had lost much of its stigma (from the days when it was largely the result of a wife's adultery). Mere incompatibility seems to have been enough.

There is some evidence, therefore, that even within a male-dominated world women were given some margins within which they could maintain an independent life. It is also clear that women did participate in decision-making in the family. A study of funerary inscriptions show that the names listed focus on a small, rather than extended, family group with women preserving their own names and taking precedence over more distant male relatives. A mother expected to be consulted over arrangements for her daughter's marriage and, in one of his letters, Cicero reports a family conference held by his friend Brutus after the assassination of Caesar. Brutus' mother Servilia seems to have actually presided. (Such a family meeting was known as a *consilium*, literally 'consultation'.)

It is clear that Romans did see marriage as having a companionate quality, as acting as a satisfier of emotional needs. Much of the evidence comes again from funerary inscriptions, especially those of freedmen whose new status would be flaunted in stone when they had died. The conventional phrasing often makes them hard to interpret but there is enough personal feeling surviving to suggest marriages were often very happy. ('You who read this,' one epitaph to a wife concludes, 'go bathe in the baths of Apollo, as I used to do with my wife. I wish I still could.')

There is also the long inscription, dating from the late first century BC and conventionally known as the *Laudatio Turiae* ('In praise of Turia'), in which a husband recaptures the virtues of his dead wife and the care and loyalty she showed to him during the turmoil of the civil wars. Unable to produce children she had even offered him a divorce, but he had rejected the offer, preferring, he said, to live with her than with another who could bear him children. (A succinct discussion of the eulogy can be found in Judith Evans Grubbs, 'The Family', chapter 16 in David Potter (ed.), *A Companion to the Roman Empire*, Oxford and New York, 2006, 313–16.)

A century later Pliny the Younger writes with real tenderness to his young wife, Calpurnia.

It is incredible how much I miss you, because I love you and then because we are not used to being separated. And so I lie awake most of the night haunted by your image; and during the day, during the hours I used to spend with you, my feet lead me, they really do, to your room; and then I turn and leave, sick at heart and sad, like a lover locked out on a deserted doorstep... (Translation: Jo-Ann Shelton)

A small group of women never experienced these affections. These were the six Vestal Virgins chosen before the onset of puberty by the *pontifex maximus* from the elite families of the city. They were required to live for thirty years in celibacy tending the flame of the temple to the goddess Vesta, the goddess of the hearth, in the Forum. Officially without family, they had full control of their own wealth, could make wills, and administer their property without a *tutor*. Although they had their own house in the Forum, they were not socially isolated. They were given a public status, with special seats reserved for them at banquets and games. There is enough evidence to show that they were aware of affairs of state and sometimes even tried to intervene. When Cicero was deciding how to deal with the Catiline conspirators (see earlier, pp. 413–14), the Vestal Virgins announced that their sacred flame had flared up, which they interpreted as support for firm action. Augustus gave his will into the care of the Virgins. On the other hand, if they broke their vow of virginity, the punishment was death. An offender was walled up alive in an underground chamber.

Women had their own festivals and cults. In the festival in honour of *Fortuna Virilis* (the Fortune of Men), for instance, women offered incense and a drink of honeyed milk and poppyseed and then bathed together in the men's bath. Ovid claimed the ritual blinded men to the bodily defects of their womenfolk. In early December, men were temporarily excluded from the house where women celebrated the festival of Bona Dea, 'the good goddess', a cult originally imported from the east. The wives of prominent citizens were invited alongside the Vestal Virgins and these took charge when the outrageous Publius Clodius (see earlier, pp. 420–1) attempted to infiltrate the ceremony disguised as a female musician when it was being held at Caesar's house. His presence had contaminated the whole rite and the Vestal Virgins ordered a repeat. Even prostitutes had their own rituals carried out at the Temple of Venus.

Marriage had its own rituals. Unlike men, women had no rite of passage at puberty and their wedding seems to have fulfilled this role. The bride sacrificed her childhood toys before being taken off in procession from her own home to that of her groom who was awaiting her. There were ceremonies of welcome and the couple sat together hand in hand on a couch as these were completed before retiring to the bridal chamber.

There were especially harrowing experiences for many women during these last years of the republic. Husbands were often away in the army and there were massive disruptions in land ownership, especially in the first century BC. It would have been hard for many to create a secure home for children. Then there were the tribulations of conception and childbirth. Cicero doted on his daughter Tullia and her own experience tells of the challenges for even the wealthy. Her first two marriages

were childless; one ended with the death of her husband, the second in divorce. Her third marriage was an unhappy one and her husband was often away with Caesar. She bore him her first child, a son, at 30. It died the same year. Pregnant again in 45 she died in childbirth and her second son survived only a month. Mortality of women in childbirth is estimated to have been between 10 and 15 in every 1,000 births. Many children died young, though if a man survived childhood and reached 20 he could expect on average another thirty-five years of life.

Tullia must have been one of hundreds of thousands of women and children whose sufferings in these disturbed times have passed unrecorded. Some took to a life of promiscuity, freely using their sexuality to enjoy a succession of lovers. Catullus and his 'love' for the dissolute Clodia have already been recorded. The Umbrian poet Propertius (c.50 BC–after 16 BC) vividly records his tortuous love affair with Cynthia, the sex snatched at odd moments. ('We used to make love then on street corners, twining our bodies together, while our cloaks took the chill off the side walk.') These women have their sexual power and well they know it. They are all too ready to deride their hapless lovers. Cynthia says to Propertius:

So you've come at last, and only because that other woman
has thrown you out and closed the doors against you.
Where have you spent the night? That night that belonged to me?
Look at you creeping back with the dawn, a wreck.
It'd do you good to have to spend the sort of night
you make me spend! You'd learn what cruelty is.
I sat up over my loom, trying to stave off sleep
then tired of that and played the lyre a little.

(Translations: J. Warden)

Cynthia's adept, and somewhat manipulative, presentation of herself as weaver and musician reminds the reader that the loom and the lyre was the symbol of the virtuous wife. When Augustus, as part of his campaign to restore social order, instituted a return to the traditional decorum of marriage he insisted that his wife Livia should be seen to be making the family's clothes. So, despite the dislocations of the late Republic, the old traditions persisted. As Gillian Clark points out in her *Women in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 1993), they are found surviving even in the late empire.

In the first of his *Georgics* the poet Virgil, whose homeland around Mantua had been laid waste in the conflicts of the late republic, pleaded with the ancient gods of Rome to allow Octavian, 'this youthful prince', to save a world which was in ruins. There had now been periods of disruption in Italy since the Social War of 90 BC with the years 49 to 31 being ones of almost continuous civil war. Octavian appeared to be in a position to offer peace. He had a monopoly of armed force, with some sixty legions under his command and the means to maintain them from the wealth of Egypt and taxation from the empire. Yet this did not assure stability. The loyalties of so many troops could not be guaranteed forever, particularly if there were no further enemies for them to confront, and their commanders were to conceive other ambitions. It was essential to have most of them disbanded and settled as soon as possible.

Octavian's position with the senators was also uncertain. Even though many had died at Pharsalus and in the proscriptions of 43 BC, the survivors still retained a belief in their role as the defenders of *libertas* against anyone who threatened to become a dictator or monarch. There was much the senators could do to make Octavian's position untenable. Even his aura as military commander was not unblemished. Accusations of cowardice at the Battle of Philippi lingered, while Actium had been a scrappy victory. Octavian had to enhance his image by emphasizing the acclamation he had received as *imperator* (the accolade given to a victorious commander by his troops) during campaigns in the Balkans in the late 30s. He adopted the title, from which the word emperor is derived, as a *praenomen*. In 29 BC, in an attempt to further dignify his image as a commander, he celebrated three glorious days of triumph: one for victory in the Balkans, one for Actium, and one for Egypt.

Whatever his failings as a commander (and his next campaign, in Spain in 26 BC, was no more than a temporary success), Octavian now proved a consummate political operator. In the years that followed he was to forge a permanent settlement with the senators that transformed the collapsed republic into an empire while still maintaining the pretence that republican ideals and institutions persisted. While never using a title grander than *princeps*, first citizen, one that had honourable precedents in the republic, Octavian was to emerge with senatorial approval as 'Augustus', with a package of powers which gave him, and, as it turned out, his successors, the status of an emperor. (See Anthony Everitt, *The First Emperor: Caesar Augustus and the Triumph of Rome*, London, 2006, for a solid biography; Karl Galinsky (ed.),

The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus, Cambridge, 2005, for essays covering most aspects of the Augustan age.)

Octavian's Character

Octavian's ambition and self-confidence had been obvious from his very first entrance into the troubled world of Roman politics at the age of 18, but unlike Alexander the Great, whose megalomania and frenetic lifestyle had destroyed him by his early thirties, he had kept himself tightly disciplined. He was conservative by instinct, a reflection of both his temperament and his upbringing in a small provincial town outside Rome. The historian Suetonius tells that he lived frugally on cheese and olives and that his house, on the Palatine Hill, was simply furnished. The recent excavations on the site show that it was as Suetonius recorded it. There were secluded rooms with simple geometric mosaics and then more fully decorated public rooms for official occasions (sadly the mosaic floors here have long since gone but there are still finely painted walls). Once the house was confirmed as Augustus', the temple adjoining it could be identified as that of Apollo, Augustus' favoured god. Here again, excavators struck lucky in finding fragments of the statue of Apollo that is recorded as standing at the entrance to the temple. This is how close we can get to the domestic Augustus (and the house is now open to the public).

In public, Augustus appeared distant, even touchy, except when in the company of close friends or advisers. According to Suetonius, his adulteries were always for reasons of state (he used his intimacy with men's wives to find out what their husbands were thinking), although in his later years he did develop a liking for young girls. There is no evidence of a man of strong sexual passions and his relationships with his wives appear to have been reserved, although he does seem to have developed genuine affection for the second, Livia, whom he had married for political reasons when she was already pregnant by her first husband.

In short, there was something calculating, even cold, about Octavian. Suetonius quotes the words he is supposed to have said to his family on his deathbed, the traditional words of a departing actor, 'If I acted well, applaud me and send me off with unanimous praise.' It seems clear that most of his public actions were carefully calculated for effect. Only on a few occasions, such as when three Roman legions were massacred in the German forests in AD 9, or when he became aware of his daughter Julia's adulteries, do his emotions seem to have broken through in some kind of nervous breakdown. He could also be superstitious.

The 'Restoration' of the Republic

Octavian's immediate aim in 29 BC, when he arrived back in Rome, was to play down any fears among senators that he might be a military dictator. He had soon

disbanded over 100,000 men and discharged them with land bought out of his own wealth, notably from the treasury of Egypt that he had appropriated for himself. It was a shrewd move as it bound the veterans directly to him and at the same time avoided the need for new taxes or confiscations of land. It was not until AD 6 that Octavian transferred responsibility for paying for the discharge of soldiers to the state. The smooth execution of the policy stands out as an accomplished act of administration in itself. A more manageable peacetime army of twenty-eight legions, probably 150,000 men, remained and with some fluctuations this was to remain the standard size of the army for most of the next century. Then, in 28 BC, as if closing the door on the many brutal events which had brought him to power, Octavian issued an edict declaring an amnesty and an annulment of any unjust orders he had given during the wars. A coin struck in 28 BC confirms his approach. One side shows Octavian, as he still was, crowned with a laurel wreath and the words 'Imperator Caesar, son of the divine, consul for the sixth time'. The other shows him as a magistrate in civilian toga with the legend: 'He revived the rights and laws of the Roman people'. The ambitious upstart, still only 34 years old, was already creating a new role for himself as senior statesman.

Octavian's opening initiative in January 27 was a surprising one, made with the support of his close advisers. He proclaimed that it was now safe to restore the republic and that he would surrender all the powers he held back to the senate. He was, in effect, asking the body to resume its traditional role. It was an astute move. The senators knew, as did Octavian, that they could not keep order without him and that they would have to offer him something back. An elaborate game followed in which both sides pretended to be acting according to republican precedents while at the same time powers were transferred, temporarily it seemed at first but, as it turned out, permanently, into Octavian's hands. Following the precedent by which Pompey had been given a command in Spain without actually having to go there, Octavian was offered the administration of the provinces of Syria, Cilicia, Cyprus, Gaul, and Spain for ten years. It was in these provinces that the bulk of the remaining legions were now stationed. Octavian was thus being tacitly confirmed as the supreme military commander. The remaining provinces were to be administered, as they had been under the republic, by senators selected by lot. A few days later came the grant of a new name, Augustus, the name by which Octavian became known through history. It was a highly emotive word evoking both dignity and piety and its adoption by Octavian added powerfully to his aura. More significantly, however, Octavian remained consul, his position renewed from year to year until 23 BC. In this case he was certainly breaking with republican tradition and risked alienating those senators who would normally have sought the post for themselves.

Now confident of his position, Augustus spent the next three years away from Rome, campaigning in Spain and Gaul, but by 23 he was back in Rome where at the beginning of the year he fell seriously ill. One result was that in July he surrendered the post of consul. This proved a wise move. It released Augustus from a heavy administrative burden and opened the post again to ambitious senators. (It became

the custom after this to elect several consuls a year, thus allowing the honour of the post to be shared more widely.) In return Augustus was given *imperium maius*, 'greater proconsular power', which gave him greater authority than other proconsuls. Unlike traditional proconsular power it did not lapse when he entered the city of Rome.

As important was the grant of the powers of a tribune. Augustus may have been given individual tribunician powers earlier (there is some scholarly dispute on what specific powers and when) but now all these were consolidated. Like any tribune he could summon the senate and the *concilium*, propose measures to them, and veto any business he disapproved of. He could be appealed to by any citizen and like any magistrate had the right to insist on his orders being obeyed. The grant of full tribunician powers proclaimed Augustus as guardian of the people's rights. The years that followed showed that he retained enormous popularity with the people of Rome. When he gave up the consulship, the crowds mistook the move as an abdication of power to the senate and rioted. Between 22 and 18 BC Augustus had to take on a variety of roles, including some of the powers of censor, to placate them. The most useful was that of supervising grain supplies, a position held by Pompey in the 50s. Public order in Rome, and thus the survival of the emperor, was so dependent on efficient distribution of food that this became a responsibility taken on by all subsequent emperors.

By 17 BC there was a feeling that stability had returned and the *Ludi Saeculares*, games traditionally celebrated, according to a Sybilline prophecy, every 110 years to commemorate relief from national danger, were held with great ceremony in Rome. A series of sacrifices were carried out over three days and nights, accompanied by games and theatrical presentations. They were followed by more honours for Augustus. He had shown immense respect for the traditional religious life of Rome, commissioning images of himself at prayer or veiled for sacrifice, and in 12 BC he became *pontifex maximus*, the official head of the priesthood. (It was characteristic of Augustus' continuing sensitivity that he allowed the former *pontifex*, Lepidus, to die before taking the post.) His new status was celebrated by one of the most fascinating complexes of Augustan Rome, a giant sundial, parts of which have now been rediscovered.

The model for the dial appears to have taken from Egyptian examples and at the centre there was indeed an obelisk from Egypt that served as the needle. (The obelisk, from the reign of Psammetichus II, see earlier p. 103, has been found and now stands in the Piazza Montecitorio.) The whole complex was designed so that on the date of Augustus' birth the tip of the shadow from the obelisk pointed towards another celebrated building of Augustan Rome, the Ara Pacis, the Altar of Peace. This great altar, fragments of which were only rediscovered in the nineteenth century (with most of it excavated in the 1930s under the patronage of Mussolini), had been commissioned earlier by the senate (in 13 BC) to welcome Augustus back from campaigns in Gaul and Spain. The imperial family, including Augustus and his grandchildren, are seen in procession on their way to sacrifice. The altar is important in showing how the senate was by now prepared to accept Augustus and his family as

a 'first family' that had been fully integrated into the religious and political life of Rome. As with all the finest Roman sculpture, it was the work of imported Greek craftsmen and echoes the serenity of Classical art, which Augustus preferred to the more ornate Hellenistic styles.

The responsibility of providing a model of family life was one that Augustus took seriously (although the means by which he had acquired Livia were scarcely praiseworthy). He seems to have been reacting against the breakdown of family life among the elite in the late republic. Adultery was made a criminal offence in 18 BC, though in effect only for women. A husband was supposed to reveal his wife's infidelities and then prosecute her. If he failed to do so he could himself be prosecuted for living off immoral earnings. Any outsider could also report adulteries and the law thus gave informers a field day. Augustus also encouraged marriage, rewarding those who had children and restricting the rights of inheritance of those who had not. His motive here must have been to restore the breeding-stock of upper-class families that had been so depleted by the civil wars.

The final honour given to Augustus was the one that he himself said meant most to him, the title *Pater Patriae*, 'Father of the Fatherland'. It came on the initiative of the crowds who forced the request on the senate in 2 BC. It was said that the normally restrained Augustus was in tears as he received the title.

Augustus' formal powers were rooted in republican precedent and there was the knowledge that they had been granted freely to him by the senate and the people of Rome. In combination and duration they extended beyond anything known in the republic. Added to them was his own *auctoritas*, that indefinable charisma and authority that enabled Augustus to achieve so much without having to rely on his formal powers. In effect he controlled the business of government. He could influence elections to the magistracies and supervise the governors of even the senate's provinces. He was commander of all the empire's armies. There was no longer any independent centre of decision-making and, almost without realizing it, the senators had surrendered their traditional role as the dominant force in Roman political life. Henceforth, the *princeps*, first citizen, the title Augustus preferred for himself, was the focus for all political activity. (*Princeps* was a form of honorary title without specific powers, a forerunner of the later *Duce* or *Führer*.)

Whatever the realities of his power, Augustus remained scrupulous in his dealings with senators. He knew the importance they attached to being addressed correctly and how much they appreciated his attending their family celebrations. He boosted the dignity of the body by expelling its more dissolute members and insisting on good birth, respectable wealth (a minimum sum of a million *sestertii*, a purely nominal amount for many grandees), and integrity. Numbers were reduced to 600 but, in accordance with republican traditions, senators continued to fill almost all the senior posts in the empire, including the governorships of the provinces and the commands of the legions. In any public proclamation in which the senate had been involved, Augustus was always careful to stress their role. Egypt was excluded from all this. The province was treated as the personal conquest of Augustus, and was the source of much of his personal wealth. No senator was

allowed to visit the province without the express permission of the emperor and it was governed on his behalf by an equestrian.

Augustus was also sensitive in the use of his formal powers. One decree sent to Cyrene in 7 BC is typical. It gave orders that were effective only 'until the senate deliberates about this or I myself find a better solution'. It gradually became common practice, however, for Augustus to write directly to governors, and soon the cities and provinces themselves began bypassing the senate and appealing directly to him. This was quite natural for petitioners in the eastern provinces who had become used over centuries to appealing to monarchs when things needed to be done. Augustus was also integrated into local ruler cults and became the focus of their prayers. In Egypt his statues were placed in the temples as those of the pharaohs and Ptolemies had been in the centuries before.

In the west of the empire, where there was no tradition of monarchical rule, the imperial cult was a more artificial creation, often established through an imposing temple. A temple to Rome and Augustus was consecrated in Lugdunum (Lyon), the administrative capital of Gaul, in 12 BC for instance, and others were to be found elsewhere. The well-preserved Maison Carrée at Nîmes in France was dedicated by the emperor to the memory of two of his adopted grandsons who he had hoped would succeed him.

As seen in Chapter 20, the Hellenistic monarchs had traditionally made their capitals, Alexandria and Pergamum, for instance, showpieces of their rule. In Rome Augustus followed their example. During the years of political breakdown in the first century BC the city had fallen into decay. (The poet Horace claimed that the gods had unleashed the civil wars on Rome as revenge for the neglect of their temples.) Caesar had attempted to build a new forum for the capital and characteristically it was this that Augustus finished first when he returned to Rome. (Augustus never forgot that it was his divine heritage that had given him entry into Roman politics.) Next, according to his boast in the *Res Gestae*, the record of his achievements that he had inscribed on the great Mausoleum he had built for himself and his family (see further below), he set to work to restore eighty-two temples. It was only then that he began on his own work, the Forum Augustum, dominated by the great temple of Mars Ultor, the god of war portrayed as the avenger of his adoptive father's death. It was dedicated in 2 BC and became a focus for the military achievements of the empire. The standards brought back from Parthia were displayed here and the senate met in the Forum when it was about to declare war. (A large part of this Forum, including its entrance, still lies under the Via dei Fori Imperiali unexcavated.)

Augustus' efforts were augmented by his lifelong friend Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, who carried out the building of the original Pantheon (see below, pp. 537–8) and the construction of the first great city baths. By Augustus' death much of central Rome had been filled with new building and what was a city of brick had become, in another of his boasts, 'a city of marble'. The buildings, statues, and decorations of the city were carefully designed to project the image of a new revived Rome, proud of its past and its reputation as a world conqueror. In the Forum

Augustum the history of Rome was flaunted in the form of two rows of statues, one proclaiming the ancestors of Augustus back to Aeneas, the other great figures from the Republic including Romulus. The porticos that sheltered these statues enclosed Augustus himself whose victories were inscribed under a great *quadriga*, a triumphal four-horse chariot erected in the Forum's centre. (Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, Ann Arbor, 1988, is the classic introduction to the use of art as propaganda by Augustus.)

These were not the only images through which Augustus projected himself. In 1863, a superb statue of Augustus was found in the villa at Prima Porta outside Rome where Augustus' wife Livia had retired after his death. The Prima Porta statue is not the original, which would have been cast in bronze, probably soon after 20 BC, but a marble copy of a few years later which Livia may have had made for herself, or certainly wished to keep after her husband's death. Augustus is shown as *imperator*, in military dress with his right hand raised as if addressing troops and celebrating victory—in this case over the Parthians (see further below). He is youthful, in an image he had adopted for his statues soon after 27. It was a break with the Roman tradition of showing statesmen as middle-aged or older and Augustus' face is idealized in a way that was common in the Greek Classical period. (The earlier tradition of Roman republican sculpture had been one of 'warts and all'.) The carefully composed body also echoes fifth-century BC ideals of symmetry as advocated by Polykleitos (see earlier, p. 246). Then there are hints of a divine ancestry, Eros, the son of Venus, is shown on a dolphin at his feet and these are, remarkably in view of the cuirass and military attire that Augustus wears, bare, always a symbol of heroic or divine status.

The title *Pater Patriae* reflected Augustus' supremacy not only in Rome but in Italy. A period of stability was desperately needed to unify the peninsula. Control of the peninsula from Rome still remained comparatively weak in a country where local loyalties had always been strong. Italy had suffered heavily in the first century, in the civil wars and endless confiscations of land as rival commanders attempted to settle their veterans. In the latest civil wars no less than sixteen major towns had been razed to the ground. Cisalpine Gaul had been formally integrated into Italy only in 42 BC and in the south the Greek cities still retained their own cultures. In his great building programme Augustus looked beyond Rome to the rest of Italy. He repaired roads and bridges, notably the important Via Flaminia that ran from Rome to Ariminum (modern Rimini), improved the security of travel by setting up guard posts along the main routes, and encouraged the building or reconstruction of towns. Many of the new towns, among them Aosta and Turin, were built to consolidate Roman control over the rich plain of the Po and they retained the atmosphere of frontier towns in an area still perceived to be vulnerable to attack from the north.

Augustus himself never forgot his own provincial roots and he was determined to integrate the wealthier Italian families into the government of Rome, not only to use talent more effectively but also to dilute the power of the Roman aristocracy. Italians were now welcome in the capital either as aspiring senators or as equestrians

who could be given administrative jobs. The army proved another unifying force in the peninsula. The legions could only recruit from among citizens and in this period this meant mostly from Italy and overseas citizen colonies. The Celtic tribes of the north proved one of the best recruiting grounds and army service was an excellent way of integrating them into the Roman way of life. Meanwhile in the countryside the end of conflict brought new prosperity. Probably no part of the empire benefited from Augustus' reign as much as Italy. One of the most common themes in the works of Horace and Virgil is the peace and fruitfulness of the land now order had been restored. Stability also allowed the continued spread of Latin, which acted as a lingua franca among the local languages of the peninsula and gradually displaced many of them.

Augustus realized the importance of establishing a professional army loyal to the state with formal conditions of service and arrangements for discharge. In 13 BC the normal period of legionary service was set at sixteen years, with annual pay of 900 *sestertii*. In AD 5 it was raised to twenty years with a discharge payment of some 12,000 *sestertii*. Increasingly it was a sum such as this rather than land that became the standard payout. From AD 6 the cost of this was borne by a military treasury. Augustus paid in 170 million *sestertii* of his own money to get it established and it was then maintained by a 5 per cent inheritance tax on all citizens and a 1 per cent sales tax. As support to the legions Augustus formalized the setting up of auxiliary units raised in the provinces from non-citizens. In most cases they drew on local military traditions and skills such as archery or horsemanship. To provide an incentive to serve, citizenship was granted to auxiliaries and their families when they retired.

An elite group among the legionaries was the Praetorian Guard. Under the republic, generals such as Marius, Caesar, and Antony had raised their own bodyguards but Augustus established a more formal and permanent unit of nine cohorts each of six centuries, about 5,400 men in all. Three of the cohorts were stationed in Rome, the other six in surrounding towns. They were commanded by equestrian Praetorian Prefects. The Guard had higher wages than legionaries, 3,000 *sestertii* a year, and had only to serve sixteen years. As the only first-class fighting force in the vicinity of Rome their role was to become crucial at times of instability, such as when an emperor died and there was no obvious successor. Their normal duties included accompanying the emperor both in Rome and when he was on campaign and on occasions keeping order in the city itself.

Augustus and the Empire

Beyond Rome and Italy stretched the empire. In the east it was still bounded by client kingdoms. In the civil wars they had been loyal to Antony, and one of Augustus' first tasks had been to tour the east gaining their allegiance for himself (22–19 BC). They were gradually to be absorbed into the empire itself. Further east, beyond direct Roman control, was Parthia, the only state that could meet Rome as an equal.

The disastrous invasions of Crassus and Antony had shown how formidable an enemy the Parthians could be. It was one of Augustus' major achievements that he came to terms with Parthia, bullying her into returning the captured Roman standards in 20 BC, and then setting up Armenia as an independent buffer state between the two empires. The event was trumpeted throughout the empire. A large issue of *denarii* bore the image of a kneeling Parthian offering up the coveted standards. On the cuirass of the Prima Porta statue the Parthian king himself is shown offering back the standard to a figure in military dress and the surrounding motifs suggest a world united in peace thanks to the dominance of Rome.

In the west Roman control was still limited. Some areas such as Spain were still unpacified, even though the Romans had nominally controlled the peninsula for 200 years. Others such as Gaul still had not been consolidated for tax purposes. All this was put in hand. Spain was pacified with great brutality while Caesar's Gallic conquests were consolidated into three provinces. The southern borders of the province of Africa were also stabilized, an important achievement in an area that, along with Italy, Sicily, and Egypt, supplied most of the grain of Rome.

In the north the borders of the empire, from the Balkans to Germany, had never been properly defined. It was here the empire was most vulnerable. The tribes, some of whom were Celtic, some German, and one, the Sarmatians, Asiatic in origin, were fiercely independent and able to offer determined resistance to the Romans. The dilemma, one that was to haunt Roman policy-making for four centuries, was whether to try and subdue them or whether to exclude them from the empire by a defended frontier. In 17 or 16 BC German tribes spilled over the Rhine, which had marked the limit of Caesar's conquests. Augustus himself went north to rally the defence and so began years of fighting along the borders. In 16 and 15 BC the Alps were subdued to secure Roman control along the Danube and allow better communication between the Rhine and the east of the empire. An initial pacification of the Balkan tribes took place between 12 and 9, with the eventual formation of the provinces of Dalmatia and Pannonia. Meanwhile Roman armies were advancing across the Rhine towards the Elbe, which was reached about 9 BC.

However, Roman control was not as complete as it seemed. A great revolt broke out in Pannonia in AD 6 that took four years of hard fighting to subdue. (The historian Suetonius believed it was the toughest war Rome had had to fight since the great struggle with Carthage.) Just as the fighting ended (AD 9) a Roman commander, Varus, who was organizing tax collection in what is now north-western Germany with three legions to support him, was ambushed and massacred with all his men. It was an appalling humiliation and the news shook Augustus more than any other of his reign. The legions were never replaced, their numbers left unused. (One of Tacitus' most graphic descriptions is of Roman armies raiding in the area seven years later coming across the whitened bones of the dead soldiers still lying in the forest. The site of the disaster, in the Teutoberger Wald, is now marked by a monument.) Retreat had to be made to the Rhine, where no less than eight legions were left stationed to guard what now had to be accepted as a permanent border. In a message left at his death Augustus warned his successors not to try to expand

further. With the exceptions of the conquest of Britain (from AD 43) and Dacia (finally in 105–6), and the absorption of client states, no further permanent additions were to be made to the empire.

The Poets of the Augustan Age

The opportunity to act as patron of the arts was too good to miss for a politician as astute as Augustus. He was especially lucky with his writers. Two of the greatest poets of the age, in fact of any age, Horace and Virgil, were already well established in Rome before Actium. By then they were also members of the cultivated circle enjoying the patronage of Maecenas, an Etruscan aristocrat, who was in his turn an intimate of Octavian. After Actium a complex relationship developed between these two independent and sensitive poets, their patron, and their ruler, who must have hoped they could be persuaded by his achievements to enhance his personal glory.

Quintus Horatius Flaccus, Horace, was born in 65 BC. His father had been a slave, freed before Horace's birth, who had made enough money to give his talented son the best education possible, first in Rome and later in Greece. Horace's debut in public life, however, was inauspicious. He had sided with Brutus against Mark Antony and Octavian at Philippi and he was lucky, after Octavian had granted an amnesty to Brutus' supporters, to be able to return to Rome and find a post as secretary to the quaestors. It was from this that Maecenas, recognizing his genius, plucked him and gave him the support needed to become a full-time poet. The support included a farm in the Sabine Hills that Horace was to immortalize as a retreat of rural bliss. (A lively biography is by Peter Levi, *Horace: A Life*, reissued London, 2012. Fuller essays are to be found in Stephen Harrison (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Horace*, Cambridge and New York, 2007.)

Like all Roman poets Horace was immersed in Greek poetry. Its influences run through his verse at such deep and complex levels that they are often impossible to disentangle. He is a poet's poet, fascinated by the actual art of making poems, and this becomes more obvious as he matures. Among his earliest work, the *Satires*, written in the 30s, are conversation pieces. Already the central themes of his later poems are there, above all the joys and agonies of friendship and sexual relationships, and the problem of finding balance, between peace in the countryside and stimulation in the town, between independence as an individual and support by a patron. In the *Epodes*, published 29 BC, many of the same themes are developed, but in a denser and more complex way. They lead on to Horace's supreme achievement, the *Odes* (published together probably in 23 BC), short lyrical poems, using Greek metres, in which each word is placed to provide alliteration or to play off against another. The composition is often so sophisticated and polished that many have continued to resist satisfying translation.

The translator's greatest challenge has often been seen as the fifth ode in Book I. Horace describes his 'shipwreck' at the hands of an unscrupulous lover, Pyrrha, and

wonders now who struggles to enjoy her favours. This is the translation of the English poet John Milton.

What slender youth bedewed with liquid odours
 Courts thee on roses in some pleasant cave,
 Pyrrha; for whom bind'st thou
 In wreaths thy golden hair,
 Plain in thy neatness; O how oft shall he
 On faith and changed gods complain: and seas
 Rough with black winds and storms
 Unwonted shall admire:
 Who now enjoys thee credulous, all gold,
 Who, always vacant, always amiable,
 Hopes thee; of flattering gales
 Unmindful? Hapless they
 To whom thou untried seem'st fair. Me in my vowed
 Picture the sacred wall declares t'have hung
 My dank and dripping weeds
 To the stern god of sea.

The *Odes* cover many subjects, from the very personal, the fear of death, the satisfaction, even glory, of being a poet, the intricacies of relationships, to grand public themes such as the celebration of Augustus' achievements. At one level Horace's life as expressed in his poetry seems calm and unhurried. He loves the contrast between the peace of the countryside, with its simple rustic virtues, and the sophisticated bustle of town life, but within a very limited range of venues he explores every nuance of personal feeling. He comes across as a sensuous man, enjoying sex, good wine, the warmth of the sun, and the fertility of the land, but underlying his work is an anxiety about being accepted socially, about his relationship with his patrons, the perennial dilemma of a man of intellectual brilliance who is dependent on support from men more wealthy than himself. He never married.

Horace's relationship with Augustus was particularly complex. Augustus, who had few intimate friends, warmed to him and even asked him to become his secretary. (The relationship provides a good example of how Augustus, despite his new grandeur, continued to be approachable.) Horace refused. He was acutely aware of the need to preserve his integrity as a poet although at the same time he knew that his way of life depended on the stability that Augustus had brought. It is only in Book III of the *Odes* that he allows himself to give unashamed support to the regime, but even here he still hints at the precariousness of power, a theme that is never far from his thoughts. Finally, in 17 BC Horace agreed to compose the Centennial Hymn for the *Ludi Saeculares* and appeared in public to conduct it. The poem was an exultation of Rome's refound greatness:

By land and sea and Mede [Parthian] now fears
 Rome's mighty hands and the Alban axes,
 Proud Scythians and Indians have just now come
 To crave audience.
 There is Trust now, and Peace, Honour and Chastity;

Ancient Virtue, long neglected
 Dares to return, and rich Abundance is amongst us
 With full horn.

(Translation: David West)

When he died, in 8 BC, Horace left everything he had to Augustus.

While the poems of Horace present an absorbing picture of the sensitivities of a gregarious and highly talented man living off his wits, his contemporary, Virgil, comes across as shy and less socially adept. (Technically Virgil is the correct spelling, derived from the Latin original Vergilius, Virgil had crept in by the Middle Ages. Both are acceptable.) Virgil was born in 70 BC to what appears a well-off family near Mantua, an area that was to suffer badly in the civil wars. (His family estates appear to have been confiscated to provide land for veterans after the Battle of Philippi.) The experience of disruption helps explain the intensity that Virgil brings to his poetry, the conviction with which he writes of the importance of stability and the sacrifices that are needed to bring order.

Like many talented provincials, Virgil was attracted by the cultural beacon of Rome and finished his education there. With his first poems, the *Eclogues*, published about 38 BC, he followed most Roman poets in taking a Greek model, in this case the Hellenistic poet Theocritus, the father of pastoral poetry (see p. 347). The *Eclogues* are pastoral poems in which peace on the land is contrasted with the threat of the disruption of war. It is this theme that is developed in Virgil's first great work, the *Georgics*, written after he had become a member of Maecenas' circle.

In contrast to the fashion of the time, the *Georgics* form a long poem, in four books, with a total of over 2,000 lines. They masquerade as a practical handbook in verse for farmers but their main purpose is very different. Virgil was writing just as the civil wars were coming to an end (the *Georgics* were completed in 29 BC). He was preoccupied, like so many Italians, with the need for peace, and the work is suffused with the hopes raised by the emergence of Octavian. ('Surely a time will come when...the farmer heaving the soil with his curved plough will come on spears all eaten up with rust or strike with his heavy hoe on hollow helmets, and gape at the huge bones in the upturned graves.' Translation: L. P. Wilkinson.) In the *Georgics*, the measured toil of farming life, its steady cultivation of crops, its frugality in the midst of fertility, which peace makes possible, echo back to the mythical past of Rome when the state was made up largely of farmers. Farming, suggests Virgil, may be an unceasing struggle against the inexorable forces of nature but it creates morally good men, those who form the backbone of a stable society. To argue his point Virgil has to romanticize. The farmer as Virgil sees him is not worn down by back-breaking toil, as must have been the case of the typical peasant farmer: he seems to be perpetually active, sensitive to the fruitfulness of the earth and even invigorated by the routine of labour in the fields.

The *Georgics* broke new ground by their length and the intensity with which their theme is presented but Virgil's masterpiece was still to come. The *Aeneid*, written between 29 and 19 BC, comes at a culmination of his life, a rare instance when an artist happens to end on the highest note possible, without a decline into old age.

(In fact the work was unfinished and only saved on the direct orders of Augustus, but then it became an instant classic, a fixture in the Roman schoolroom.) Virgil had the same problem as Horace. He was deeply grateful for the order that Augustus had brought (and fearful that it would end) but unwilling to surrender his independence as an artist simply to glorify the new regime. After the *Georgics* his ambition was to write an epic. An obvious theme was the rise and triumph of Octavian but Virgil knew that in doing so he would have to gloss over the brutal realities involved in the struggle for power. It was much better to look further back into Roman history and eventually Virgil chose the legend of the Trojan Aeneas. The legend, as Virgil adapted it for his purposes, told how Aeneas, fleeing from the capture of Troy, voyaged across the Mediterranean and eventually arrived in Italy after a celebrated love affair with Dido, queen of Carthage. After bloody struggles for supremacy, he founded the family that was itself to found Rome. The attraction of the story was that Augustus' adoptive family, the Julians, claimed their own descent from Aeneas and so indirectly Virgil was glorifying his emperor.

The *Aeneid* is consciously modelled on Homer. The wanderings of Aeneas in the first part echo the *Odyssey* and the battles of the second the *Iliad*. It was an audacious undertaking, particularly from a man who, in famous lines from Book VI of the *Aeneid* (see below, p. 418), acknowledged the supremacy of the Greeks in all the arts, but it was a subject which allowed Virgil to use his powers to the full. The greatness of the *Aeneid* lies not just in the majesty and beauty of its language but in its courage in tackling the agonies involved in power and destiny. Rome has been given its tasks by the gods and must not flinch from achieving its empire. Virgil captures the emotional force of Aeneas' separation from his homeland, his loneliness, and what seems to be a refuge in the arms of Dido, before duty and the will of the gods drive him on to the hostile shores of Italy. Here the battles he wages to establish himself are ruthless and destructive. Virgil is free, as he would never have been if he had written directly about Augustus, to dwell on the pity and waste of war and to write sympathetically of the victor's opponents. Yet there is an end, order established and the rise of Rome foretold. Taken into the underworld, Aeneas sees the future Octavian: 'This is the man, this one, of whom so often you have heard the promise, Caesar Augustus, son of the deified, who shall bring once again the Age of Gold to Latium...' A past prophecy has been fulfilled in the present. Virgil's respects have been paid and his hopes for the future expressed without any compromise to his independence. (An acclaimed recent translation is by Sarah Ruden, *The Aeneid*, New Haven and London, 2008. Wider perspectives are provided by Charles Martindale (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*, Cambridge and New York, 1997.)

There were other important poets of this generation, Propertius and Tibullus, for instance, who both saw poetry as the best way to express the struggle of the lover against the agonies imposed by desire and dominant women, but the third major star of the reign was a much younger man, Publius Ovidius Naso. Ovid came from a peaceful and fruitful part of central Italy that had been left relatively untouched by the civil wars. He was still only a boy of 12 when the wars ended

and, as a member of a well-off provincial family, he was free to make his way in a society much more settled than that known by Horace and Virgil. When he came to Rome to study rhetoric, he seemed set on a conventional career. His father's hopes were that he would progress to the senate. (A good survey is provided by the essays in Philip Hardie (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, Cambridge and New York, 2002.)

However, Ovid's greatest love was the use of language and he engineered his life so that it became one of full-time writing. He never committed himself to the imperial establishment to the same degree as Horace and Virgil and he emerges as a freer and less inhibited poet as a result. His first published work, the *Amores* (around 20 BC), explores the life of young lovers let loose in a large metropolitan city. Trips are made to the races and theatre against a background of all the frustrations, delights, joys, and sufferings of young love. The *Amores* are elegies (elegies took their name from the metre in which they were written and were used, in classical times, to express a wide range of subjects, not only the 'songs of lamentation' with which the word is now associated), and they set a standard of the genre for later generations.

In *The Art of Love* (possibly around 1 BC), a much more cynical and world-weary poet writes of the stratagems to be used by both men and women to seduce those they desire. 'The first thing to get in your head', writes Ovid, 'is that every single girl can be caught and that you'll catch her if you set your toils right. Birds will sooner fall dumb in springtime, cicadas in summer, or a hunting dog turn his back on a hare, than a lover's bland inducements can fail with a woman.' (Translation: Peter Green.) As it follows its decadent theme, the *Art of Love* is filled with the detail of everyday life in Roman society, the devices with which women make themselves look beautiful, the skills of hair-dressing, and the appropriate lover's gift.

Ovid's hunger for new forms of expression was also to find a rich source in Greek mythology. In his *Metamorphoses* (about AD 2) he constructs a rich tapestry of stories from the time of creation to his own day. The common theme is the transformation of the characters into new shapes, from human to animal or plant as history moves on towards contemporary events. So finally the human Julius Caesar is transformed into a god and, by implication, so will Augustus become divine. Yet underlying the entire poem is the volatility of the natural world in which little is stable. This remains a world of anxiety. The *Metamorphoses* are a highly inventive work that remained Ovid's most popular throughout the Middle Ages (and provided the inspiration for Roberto Calasso's modern reinterpretation of classical myth *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, London and New York, 1993, as well as the acclaimed free translation of the English poet Ted Hughes, *Tales from Ovid*, London and New York, 1997).

Ovid was sensitive and cynical by turns, but always brilliant and ready to break new ground. He was right to express an increasing sense of unease among the writers of the period as the regime consolidated itself. Finally he fell foul of Augustus. His 'crime' is not known. Augustus certainly disliked Ovid's celebration of sexual freedom for women at a time when he was trying to uphold more

austere moral codes (it did not help that some of Augustus' new public monuments were recommended as pick-up points) but there was some other more serious offence, possibly association with political opposition. Augustus summoned him personally in AD 8 and sent him into remote exile to the Black Sea. He was separated from everything he loved, the bustling *demi-monde* of Rome, even his third wife. He was never allowed to return, and died about AD 17, after composing a final set of poems bemoaning his exile (in an excellent translation by Peter Green for Penguin Classics).

The *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*

Towards the end of his life Augustus compiled a list of his achievements, the *Res Gestae*, 'what has been achieved'. It is an inspired piece of political propaganda that has not only defined Augustus' reign but provided a model for 'good' emperors to follow. A bronze copy was placed in front of Augustus' mausoleum and other copies distributed to temples dedicated to the imperial cult. The best surviving example, in both Greek and Latin versions, was inscribed on the walls of the temple to Rome and Augustus at Ancyra in central Anatolia, possibly by the provincial governor after Augustus' death. Very recently a fragment of the text has been discovered at Sardis. (The text of the *Res Gestae* is now translated with a full commentary by Alison Cooley, Cambridge and New York, 2009.)

Although inscriptions on stone were commonplace in both Greek and Roman cities, there is no exact equivalent of this text. It appears to have been an initiative of Augustus. He was adept at combining a record of his military achievements with one of the munificence with which he spent the plunder on embellishing the city of Rome, restoring temples, throwing games and gladiator displays, and improving the water supply. He presented himself as a world conqueror, on a par with Alexander, but he emphasized that, unlike Alexander, his conquests extend west as well as east. So perhaps he has even surpassed him. Then Augustus stresses how he had willingly surrendered his power in 28–27 to the Senate so that this could also be seen as a restored republic. Yet there is also the underlying theme, so fully proclaimed in the imperial art of the period, that this is indeed a new era. The question was whether stability could be sustained.

The Problem of the Succession

Augustus' powers had been granted personally to him by the senate for life. There was no imperial constitution and theoretically the Republic could have been revived on his death. However, by the time that moment came in AD 14, forty-five years after Actium, the principate had become too firmly entrenched for the republic to be restored. In fact long before his death Augustus had been trying, in true monarchical fashion, to designate an heir. Yet his insistence that members of

his own family take commands meant that their early deaths were common. His hopes rested on his only daughter Julia, whom he exploited shamelessly in the hope of producing male grandchildren. In 23 BC she was forced into a second marriage to Augustus' closest colleague Agrippa who was old enough to be her father. In the short term the aim of the marriage seemed to have been met. Three sons were born. For years the hopes of the succession rested on the two eldest, Gaius and Lucius Caesar. However, by AD 4, both were dead. Another son, known as Agrippa Postumus (because he was born, in 12 BC, after Agrippa's death), was passed over by Augustus as not being suitable for the throne and subsequently, it appears, murdered.

In 11 BC Julia was bullied into a third marriage to Tiberius, the son of Augustus' wife Livia by her first husband. It was not a success, there were no surviving children, and Julia took refuge in a string of affairs that caused so much scandal she was eventually exiled by her father from Rome. On the death of his second grandson, Augustus was forced to adopt his stepson Tiberius as his own son and designate him as heir. As a mark of his special status Tiberius was granted the tribunician power (this became a normal way in which an emperor designated his successor). By the time of Augustus' death in AD 14 his position as successor was undisputed. Tiberius, however, conscious that he was not Augustus' first choice and now in his fifties, accepted only out of his sense of duty.

The procedures for the succession remained undefined. Most emperors tried to keep it within their own families, picking and choosing one of their relatives who had the right attributes. Alternatively a female member of the family could be married to a worthy candidate who was then adopted within the family or there could be a straightforward adoption of a favoured figure. When an emperor failed completely and was overthrown or assassinated then there was the chance of setting up a new dynasty altogether. All these options were taken in the following centuries but the idea of imperial rule, the concept that it was better to have one man at the top on whom all allegiances could be focused and who could coordinate the effective defence and administration of the empire, remained intact.

Augustus had been ailing for several years before his death. When the moment finally came, everything was in hand for the succession. Augustus died at Nola in August (the month named in his honour, as July had been named in honour of Caesar). After cremation his ashes were buried in his Mausoleum with great ceremony, and when a senator reported having seen his spirit ascending through the flames of the funeral pyre to heaven it was decreed by the senate that the Divine Augustus should be ranked among the gods of the state. His divinity, the decree ran, rested on 'the magnitude of his benefactions to the whole world'.

Augustus had created a new political system that had brought peace and stability to the empire. This stability was achieved at the expense of the old republican liberties, the traditional powers of the senate and the assemblies, and the direction by noble families of government through the magistracies. The risk was that the new system would degenerate into tyranny and in several reigns that followed it did. Yet no alternative form of government ever emerged in the Roman empire and emperors stretched in an almost unbroken line to the final overthrow of Constantinople in 1453. This is the measure of Augustus' achievement.

Suetonius and Tacitus

There are two major sources for the political developments of the early empire, the equestrian Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus (born c. AD 70) and the senator Publius Cornelius Tacitus (AD 56 to after 117). Both worked in the early second century AD when the more tolerant rule of Trajan allowed them to write more freely than had been possible under the 'tyranny' of Domitian (see below). Suetonius' most celebrated surviving work is his set of biographies of the emperors, *On the Lives of the Caesars* (from Julius Caesar to Domitian). In each biography he follows a similar pattern: the early life of his subject, his public career, physical appearance, and private life. For the early lives Suetonius had access to the imperial archives (he was an imperial secretary until dismissed by Hadrian) and he also drew on gossip and reminiscences though often without much discrimination. The result is a highly readable collection of vignettes whose accuracy is open to question.

A far greater historian is Tacitus. Tacitus' career, as a senator, began under Vespasian but it was his experience of the tyrannical reign of Domitian that defined his attitudes to the past. Tacitus wrote his accounts of the first century AD from the perspective of one who was nostalgic for the ancient liberties of the republic and who saw many of the emperors as destroyers of these liberties. Yet he is also aware of the underlying problems in writing any kind of history at all. 'Some', he writes in the *Annals*, 'hold as true whatever they hear, others twist truth into fiction, and both types of perversion become more extreme with the passing of time.' It may be that one of the points that Tacitus is making is that the 'perversions' are the direct result of a government that has lost its contact with the masses and become secretive.

‘Truth’ becomes lost within the machinations of those in power. (A reliable biography of Tacitus is by Ronald Mellor, *Tacitus*, New York and London, 1993. Wider perspectives are provided by A. J. Woodman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Tacitus*, Cambridge and New York, 2009.)

Tacitus’ earliest work is a panegyric life of his father-in-law Agricola, governor in Britain, whom he felt Domitian had betrayed. This was followed by the *Germania*, a study of the German tribes. Many of the details of their daily life compiled by Tacitus have been confirmed by archaeological research although the whole is set within an ideological framework in which the ‘virtuous’ German is set against the ‘decadent’ Roman. (For the legacy of this text in Renaissance Europe and afterwards see Christopher Krebs, *A Most Dangerous Book*, New York, 2011.) In his *Histories* of the period AD 69–96, of which only the first part survives, and his *Annals*, which cover AD 14–68 (although here again much is missing), Tacitus shows the same ability to distance himself from the Romans and to understand that not all their subjects had cause to welcome Roman rule.

There is a strong moral undertone to Tacitus’ writings and he is fascinated by the problems caused by tyrannical rule, in particular for those ‘good’ men who manage to survive under it. Thucydides is the nearest equivalent among the Greek historians. This makes for an absorbing and penetrating narrative shaped by Tacitus’ determination to expose his villains and glorify his heroes. As Ronald Mellor puts it in his study of Tacitus, ‘If other ancient writers examined the human psyche as affected by war (Homer), by love (Ovid), by suffering (Sophocles), and by religion (Euripides’ *Bacchae*), Tacitus above all others probes the individual personality transformed by political absolutism...’ Even Augustus failed to escape his acute, if waspish, analysis:

He seduced the army with bonuses and his cheap food policy was successful bait for civilians. Indeed, he attracted everybody’s good will by the enjoyable gift of peace. Then he gradually pushed ahead and absorbed the functions of the senate, the officials, and even the law. Opposition did not exist. War or judicial murder had disposed of all men of spirit. Upper-class survivors found that slavish obedience was the way to succeed, both politically and financially... (Translation: Michael Grant)

Tiberius

By concentrating on the personalities of the emperors and their relationships with those around them in Rome neither Suetonius nor Tacitus does full justice to his subjects as rulers of a Mediterranean empire (although, of course, Tacitus shows in his earlier works that he is fully aware of politics at and beyond the limits of Roman imperial power). This particularly affects Tacitus’ portrayal of Tiberius, whom the historian treated as cynically as he had done Augustus. In fact Tiberius was one of the most gifted men of his age and certainly the most experienced of the possible successors to Augustus. He had borne the brunt of the fighting along the northern borders and had been entrusted with regaining the standards lost by Crassus at

Carrhae, one of the greatest diplomatic coups of Augustus' reign. He was a fine administrator and a good judge of men. He knew that the empire needed peace and stability and that the prosaic tasks of keeping expenditure low, appointing sound generals and administrators, and punishing those who overstepped the mark were essential if the achievements of Augustus were to be sustained. Even Tacitus had to accept that at first Tiberius' appointments and supervision of the empire were sound. The twenty-three years of Tiberius' reign were crucial ones for consolidating the foundations laid by Augustus. (For this chapter an excellent introductory survey is Martin Goodman, *The Roman World, 44 BC–AD 180*, 2nd edition, London and New York, 2012. The 'Narrative' chapters, nos. 6–8, in David Potter (ed.), *A Companion to the Roman Empire*, Oxford and New York, 2006, offer a succinct overview (to AD 337). On Tiberius, see Robin Seager, *Tiberius*, 2nd edition, Oxford and New York, 2005.)

The death of Augustus provoked a mutiny among the troops on the Rhine, apparently in the hope of better conditions, but this was soon quelled. Otherwise the succession took place peacefully. Tiberius already had the tribunician power and could summon the senate on his own authority. What was surprising was how easily the senators, used to working the republican system in which all magistracies were elected, accepted the principle that the son, real or adopted, of an emperor would be his successor. The recognition of a ruling dynasty, the 'Julio-Claudian', shows just how fundamental the shift in power within the Roman state had become. (Tiberius came from the Claudii, one of the most ancient families of Rome. His integration into the Julians, Augustus' adopted family, gives the dynasty its name.) When the people of Cyprus swore an oath of loyalty to Tiberius in 14 it was to the emperor 'and all his house'.

However, Tiberius was now 55. His life had been an active one, largely based in the army camps, and he had never been at ease with the senatorial aristocracy who had enjoyed more leisured lives in Rome. It appears that he was reluctant at his age to take on the range of powers held by Augustus. He would have much preferred to have shared responsibility with the senate. When, at the meeting held to confer imperial authority on him, he hesitated in accepting it, the senate felt rebuffed. Without Augustus' personal touch and authority the ambiguities of the imperial role were exposed and Tiberius never found a formula that satisfied the senators. The relationship remained uneasy, or worse, for the whole of his reign.

The people of Rome, hungry as ever for 'bread and circuses', were no better impressed. Squandering resources on shows was not Tiberius' way and the crowds focused instead on Germanicus, Tiberius' nephew, designated by Augustus as Tiberius' heir. Germanicus was campaigning along the German borders in the hope of avenging the defeat of Varus. It was a fruitless task with little in the way of long-term gains. Tiberius felt that the frontiers should be stabilized rather than extended and recalled Germanicus in AD 16. The extravagant triumph Germanicus held in Rome consolidated his reputation as the darling of the masses. Tiberius then sent him east to bring order to the client kingdoms there, but when he died in Antioch in AD 19 there were many who believed Tiberius had connived with the

local governor in poisoning him. When Tiberius, in an effort to calm the hysteria with which Germanicus' ashes were received in Rome, refused to attend their interment, his guilt seemed confirmed.

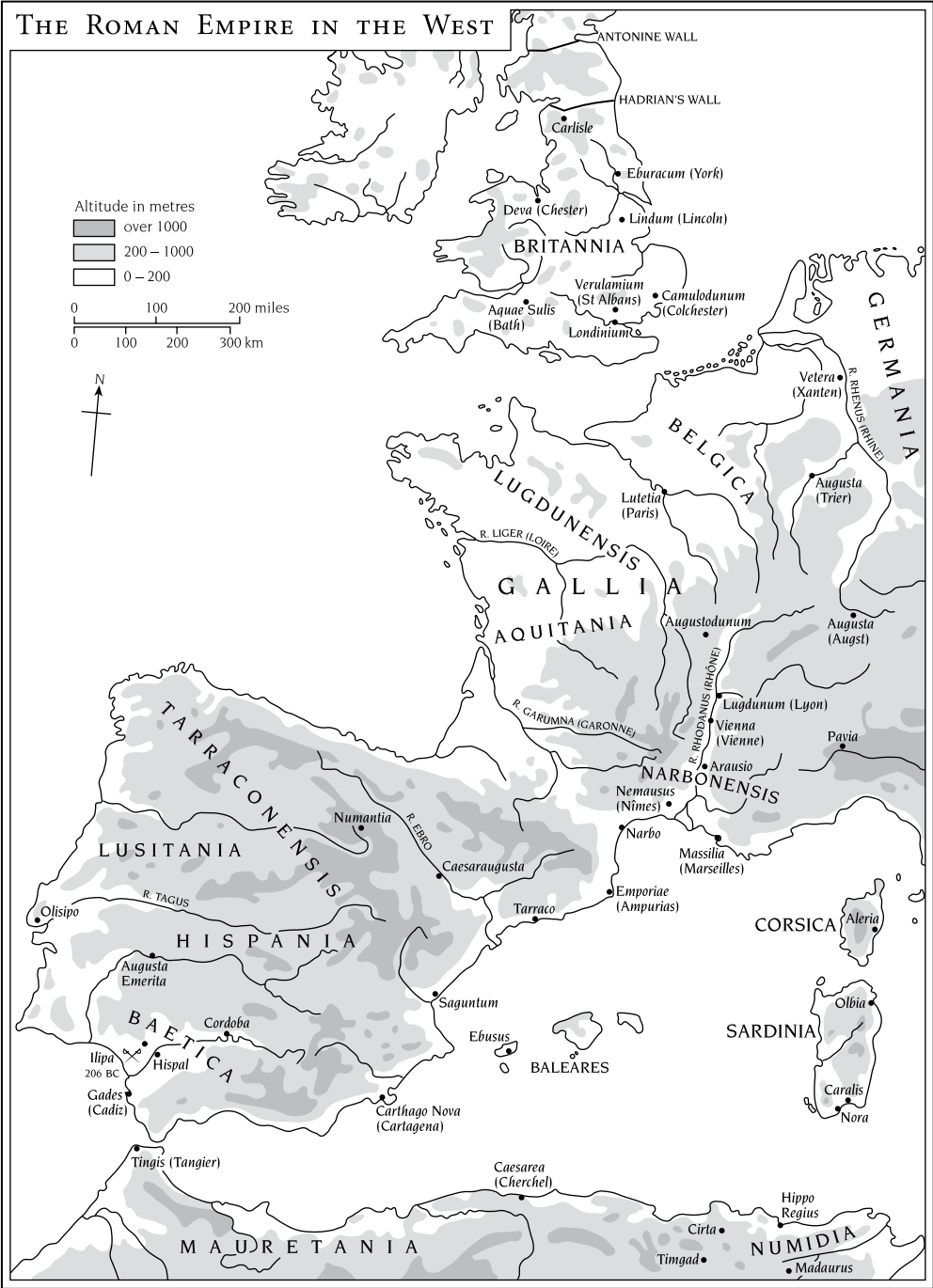
The new heir was Drusus, Tiberius' own son and his preferred successor. Tragically he died in 23. Tiberius' distress, and perhaps an increasing reluctance to appear in public when he developed a disfiguring skin disease, made him all the more isolated and in 26 he withdrew to an imperial palace on the island of Capri. In essence he had abdicated. 'He let all affairs of state slide', Suetonius tells us, 'neither filling vacancies that occurred in the equestrian order, nor making new appointments to senior military posts, or the governorships of provinces.' Suetonius revels in the details of the supposed sex life of the elderly Tiberius, but the companions he chose to accompany him to Capri seem to have been eminently respectable.

In Rome, with the senate now apparently unable to take any form of initiative, there was a power vacuum. It was filled by Sejanus, the Prefect of the Praetorian Guard. Although Sejanus was only an equestrian he was not a mere upstart. His father had been the prefect of Egypt and he had links to noble families. He was ambitious and, if Tacitus is to be believed, coldly single-minded in his pursuit of power. He grouped the Guard, the only effective military force in Italy, into one barracks on the edge of Rome, pushed aside rivals, and gained the appointment of supporters to provincial governorships. Tiberius trusted him ('my partner in toil', he described him on one occasion) and had made him fellow consul for part of the year 31. When he discovered later in that year how Sejanus was plotting to succeed him his reaction was immediate. A letter was sent to the senate denouncing Sejanus. The same senators who had fawned to him when he was the emperor's favourite now had no compunction in deserting him. He was executed the same day and his family was included so that his line would be destroyed for ever. To meet the legal requirement that a virgin could not be executed the executioner raped his young daughter before strangling her.

Tiberius was now in his seventies. Old age, isolation, and suspicion of those jockeying for power now that the succession was open made his last years ones of deepening gloom and even terror. Supporters of Sejanus were still being executed two years later. Within the imperial family two of Germanicus' sons and his widow Agrippina were executed or committed suicide. Tiberius eventually designated as joint heirs his great-nephew Gaius, the last surviving son of Germanicus, and his grandson by Drusus, Tiberius Gemellus. (It was now certain that the succession should run on dynastic lines.) He died in 37 at the age of 77. The news was greeted with rejoicing. Certainly the last years of Tiberius had been dispiriting ones overshadowing the real achievements of the reign.

The Prosperity of Italy

It was in Italy that the fruits of good administration were most enjoyed. The field survey of southern Etruria carried out by the British School at Rome shows that the first century brought a countryside dotted with comfortable farmhouses and the



MAP 13(A)



MAP 13(B)



villas of a richer class. Campania, always one of the most fertile areas of Italy, thanks to its benign climate and volcanic soil, was particularly favoured. A farmhouse such as San Rocco, near Capua, meticulously excavated by the British archaeologist Molly Cotton in the 1960s, became transformed into an opulent villa during the reign of Augustus and in the first century acquired a grand new bath house. Its economic base was also transformed, as commercial opportunities increased. There were new olive presses and tile-making facilities. (When I was working on the dig I was set to work uncovering the *dolia*, the storage jars in which the fruits of the harvest were stored.) This seemed typical of much of Italy, with agriculture further boosted by the opportunities to export oil, wine, and pottery, for example, to newly pacified parts of the empire. (There is still much of value in Tim Potter's *Roman Italy*, London, 1987.)

As richer landowners consolidated their advantages in an expanding market the distribution of wealth in Italy may, however, have become even more unequal. Not the least of the beneficiaries of imperial rule was the traditional senatorial aristocracy—one reason, perhaps, why they were so politically quiescent. A fine example, if from a slightly later period, is provided in the letters of Pliny the Younger (?AD 61–113). His estates were large and prosperous (in a good year his property in Umbria alone brought in 400,000 *sestertii*). Although he was busy in public life, in the law courts, as an official in the state treasury, as an augur, and, finally, as governor of the province of Bithynia-Pontus in the early second century, he also had ample time to visit his estates and enjoy a cultivated lifestyle, appreciating the peace and beauty of the countryside, reading books in sunny corners of his villas, and writing letters to friends. He was particularly sentimental about his estates around Lake Como, which had been in his family for generations. Although, like Tacitus, with whom he was friendly, Pliny was overawed by Domitian, he presents a more favourable picture of political life among the elite. His letters make no mention of the grotesque cruelties of the court detailed by Tacitus and he writes with real tenderness of his third wife, Calpurnia. This is a world where leisure brings the time to cultivate relationships. Pliny's correspondence with the emperor Trajan (see below, p. 504) maintains a tone of mutual respect.

As in all periods when wealth is rapidly increasing, the traditional ruling class was confronted by those who had made their money more recently. One senator, Petronius, chose to satirize the new rich in his novel *The Satyricon*. The central character of the surviving fragments is Trimalchio. Born a slave, he boasts at an extravagant dinner party of how he was freed after satisfying the sexual desires of both his master and mistress and became joint inheritor, with the emperor, of his master's fortune. A lucky trading enterprise gave him the wherewithal to invest in land and thus ape the lifestyle of the aristocracy. In fact, he is completely out of place in their world. He is appallingly ostentatious, enjoys humiliating his slaves, and brags of the monumental tomb he will have erected to his memory, but he indicates, in an exaggerated way, the rich pickings available for a tiny minority. (There is no evidence to suggest that the life of the majority—the tenant farmer or the small peasant producer, for instance—was anything other than hard, even in this time of relative prosperity.)

Caligula

Tiberius' successor, Gaius, often known by the nickname Caligula, 'little boot', given him when he was a small boy with his popular father Germanicus in the army camps, proved to be in character closer to Trimalchio than to Pliny. He succeeded to the imperial throne as sole ruler and was granted full imperial powers by the senate within a day, a sign of how readily the senators were prepared to acquiesce in a transfer of power, once it was clear there was no alternative successor. (Tiberius Gemellus was awarded an honorary title and then pushed aside and murdered within a year.)

The senators were soon to regret their enthusiasm. Gaius was only 24 and untried. He had never had the sobering experience of commanding an army, for instance. Now he suddenly had the enormous but still loosely defined powers of an emperor together with a vast fortune (2,300 million *sestertii*, it was said). He clearly felt he had to make some kind of impact as emperor and so began such a vast spending spree that most of his inheritance was exhausted within a year. In one extraordinary instance he had a bridge of boats three Roman miles long built across the Bay of Baiae, seemingly to disprove a taunt that it was impossible. Favourites—a charioteer, for example—could suddenly find themselves 2 million *sestertii* richer.

There was more to Gaius' behaviour than mere immaturity. He was certainly unstable with a particularly perverse sense of humour. The accounts suggest that he enjoyed dominating others, humiliating them or inflicting cruelty. He would order men to be killed 'so that they could feel they were dying' or, in one case, a famous actor to be flogged slowly so that he could hear his fine voice shrieking for longer. His power was so unlimited that he believed himself to have transcended mortal life. While Tiberius had turned down an offer from Spain to have a temple dedicated to him ('I am a mere mortal, fulfilling the duties of a man... men will give my memory enough,' Tacitus reports him saying), Gaius appeared dressed as a variety of gods. He ordered his head to be placed on a statue of Zeus at Olympia and outraged the Jews by ordering a similar statue for the Temple at Jerusalem.

Extravagant antics were at first popular with the Roman crowds. It was good entertainment and inevitably some of the big spending trickled down to the poor, but as the money ran out and Gaius dreamed up new taxes which fell on the urban poor his popularity quickly slumped. The crowds resented his disdainful treatment of them when he attended the Circus Maximus. Among the senators disillusion had set in more quickly. Gaius treated the senate with contempt. Senators were arbitrarily accused of treason and forced to commit suicide. It soon became obvious that it was impossible to allow this perverse man in his twenties with possibly fifty years of life ahead to continue in power. With no constitutional means of removing an emperor, the only way was assassination. A conspiracy was organized by members of the Praetorian Guard with support from within the senate and in January 41 Gaius was set upon as he was leaving the games and stabbed to death.

In the constitutional hiatus that followed the old republican cry of the aristocracy, *libertas*, was briefly heard in the senate house. However, the republic was by now past restoration. Once again the senate simply acquiesced in events when the Praetorian Guard proposed as the new emperor Claudius, a brother of Germanicus, whom, it was said, they had found cowering behind a curtain in the imperial palace. Whether this was true or not, Claudius recovered his composure quickly enough to reward the Guard with money, a precedent they were not to forget. That and the aura of his family name was enough to secure his succession.

The Emperor Claudius

Claudius has been immortalized in the novels *I, Claudius* and *Claudius the God*, by Robert Graves (novels brought to life in a masterful television portrayal of Claudius by Derek Jacobi). He may have been born with cerebral palsy. He was unable to control his limbs properly and faltered when he had to speak in public, though his mind was unaffected by these physical problems. In an age where public appearance was so important he had been kept by his family in the shadows and in compensation had developed a range of scholarly interests. He knew better than any emperor before him how the Roman state had evolved and seems to have acquired the conviction that he could do better than his immediate predecessors. (A fine biography is by Barbara Levick, *Claudius*, New Haven and London, 1990.)

Claudius' weakness was that he had no centre of support, either in the senate, which felt that he had been foisted on it, or in the army, which had never seen him in command. He was to do his best to repair the position with the senators, speaking to them on frequent occasions, but he mistrusted their competence and the more traditional senators resented it when he proposed, as one of his more far-seeing policies, that leading provincials from Gaul should be admitted to the house. The uneasy relationship sometimes broke down into hostility and there were several conspiracies against him. Altogether thirty-five senators are known to have been executed during his reign.

The army offered a more satisfying opportunity. It could be used for a conquest for which Claudius, as emperor, could then take credit. An invasion of Britain had been talked of for decades. Caesar's experience had shown that undertaking the empire's first conquest across the ocean attracted all the prestige later given to launching into space. There were also more practical reasons for an invasion. Although many British tribal leaders had diplomatic relationships with the Romans, and even copied their coins from Roman models, continuing power struggles between British tribes threatened the trade routes along which grain, hides, and iron were conveyed across the Channel to the armies of the Rhine. There was always the fear that one chieftain might unite Britain and confront the empire from the west. A Roman conquest would secure southern Britain, stabilize it, and provide plunder to refill the imperial treasury depleted by the extravagances of Gaius. Everything, not least Claudius' political needs, combined to make the invasion attractive.

The conquest of southern Britain was efficiently done. Forty thousand troops were ferried over the Channel in AD 43 and soon the southern part of the country was under Roman control. (Despite his own military inexperience Claudius had a talent for appointing competent commanders.) The emperor came from Rome, his presence made more impressive by a troop of elephants he took with him, and was in time to lead his men into Camulodonum, the capital of the Catuvellaunian tribe (the modern Colchester). He accepted the homage of eleven defeated chieftains. Claudius, like Tiberius, had no particular enthusiasm for being portrayed as a god but he did allow a temple in his honour to be built at Colchester to provide a focus for the emotions and loyalties of a people shattered by their defeat. Its foundations are still intact under Colchester's later Norman castle.

The surrender of the tribes was enough to allow Claudius to return to Rome to throw an extravagant triumph. His small son, born in 41, was renamed Britannicus in the exultation of a victory which was proclaimed on coins throughout the empire. Meanwhile in Britain the process of pacification went on. A famous excavation by the British archaeologist Sir Mortimer Wheeler at Maiden Castle in Dorset in the 1930s claimed to trace the progress of the final battle for a Celtic stronghold from the hastily dug graves of those killed in the Roman assault.

Claudius was in power for thirteen years. The business of the empire was gradually becoming more complex. In addition to Britain, two more provinces in Mauretania, as well as Thrace and Lycia, were added to the empire in his reign. The emperors themselves were becoming men of vast wealth. It had become the custom for those without heirs to leave their possessions to the emperor, particularly if they had been given any patronage. Maecenas and Horace both left property to Augustus, who claimed in his will that his inheritances had totalled 1,400 million *sestertii*. Claudius was not greedy for more wealth and he forbade those with surviving relatives to make him their heir, but he continued nevertheless to accumulate property. So evolved the imperial *patrimonium*, the vast quantity of land that passed from one emperor to another, even if there was a coup d'état. It could not be alienated, in contrast to an emperor's *ratio privata*, his personal wealth, which he could deal with freely. The *patrimonium* included an array of estates, forests, and mines, often so extensive that they formed a state within a state, controlled by the imperial procurators and outside the aegis of the provincial governors.

These developments, added to the failure of the senate to participate in public business, led Claudius to develop his own imperial bureaucracy. Although there is some dispute as to how exactly this worked, it seems that there were four departments, each under a freedman (whose loyalty to Claudius as their emancipator would be guaranteed). One dealt with the emperor's correspondence, one with his personal finances, and another with petitions and legal matters. The fourth was an archivist. From AD 53 imperial procurators, appointed independently of the governors and subject only to the emperor, oversaw the imperial estates. 'Good' emperors increasingly saw their wealth as there to be used for the benefit of the state as a whole. Gradually, through a process that remains obscure, the funds of the republican treasury, the *aerarium*, became merged with the private wealth of the emperor, the *fiscus*.

The consolidation of an imperial bureaucracy further diminished the role of the senate. Senators found it humiliating to have to do their business with the emperor through freedmen, especially when it became clear that these were making fortunes in the process. Narcissus, the chief secretary, reputedly ended up 400 million *sestertii* richer, the largest fortune recorded for any single Roman. As a further blow to senatorial prestige Claudius transferred other responsibilities, such as the regulation of the grain supply and the care of roads in Rome, to himself, continuing a trend of imperial involvement set by Augustus, but relying on equestrians rather than senators to oversee the work.

One of Claudius' concerns was the more efficient administration of Rome. By the first century Rome was a crowded, bustling, and often dangerous city with a population of perhaps a million. A city of this size was unable to support itself from a pre-industrial economy and the empire's economy and state administration was distorted to keep Rome alive and politically quiescent. It is estimated that 200,000 tonnes of grain had to be imported a year, with much of it distributed free to the poorer citizens of the city. Some of it came from the wealthier parts of Italy such as Campania but the main sources were Sicily, Sardinia, the province of Africa, and, after 30 BC, Egypt. Increasingly the emperors provided some of the grain from their own estates. The emperors took responsibility for the provision of corn through an official, the *praefectus annonae* (*annona*, the corn supply). Transport to Rome was provided by private merchants and, to induce them to provide for the city, Claudius offered privileges, including that of citizenship, to those with large ships who would sign a contract to deliver grain to Rome over six years.

These achievements have been overshadowed by the popular image of Claudius, drawn from the pages of Suetonius. This is of a man at the mercy of his unscrupulous and scheming wives. Intrigue was probably inevitable in the imperial household. Claudius was 50 when he became emperor so that succession was bound to be a live issue. His own son, Britannicus, had been born only in 41, leaving the throne open to many older cousins. His mother, Messalina, the emperor's third wife, knew that if Britannicus was pushed aside she would be as well. She freely used her sexuality to maintain her influence. (There were few alternatives for ambitious women in the male-dominated world of Roman politics.) However, in 48 she went too far and entered into some form of marriage ceremony with a young senator, Gaius Silius. This could only be seen as a blatant attempt to depose Claudius and it failed utterly. She was exposed and executed.

Claudius' next wife was Agrippina, his own niece and the daughter of his popular brother Germanicus. In political terms the marriage was a shrewd move as it consolidated the unity of the family against rivals for power. On the other hand, Agrippina had her own son who was three years older than Britannicus and thus an obvious rival for the succession. He took the all-encompassing name Nero Claudius Drusus Germanicus Caesar. Agrippina seems to have consolidated her position quickly, perhaps because Claudius' powers were failing. She had herself proclaimed Augusta, appeared as an important figure on public occasions, was represented on coins, and gave her name to at least one new Roman colony. Her main aim was to

install Nero as successor. In 52 he was awarded the *toga virilis*, the mark of mature adulthood, at 13 a year early. Theoretically he could now become emperor. Britannicus would not achieve the same status until the year 55 and so it was important for Agrippina to act fast. In October 54 Claudius died, the victim, it was said, of a dish of poisonous mushrooms fed to him by Agrippina. Nero, still aged only 16, was proclaimed emperor. Britannicus, four months under age, could not succeed with him, but the day before he reached the required age of 14 he died at a banquet. Nero passed off the cause of death as an epileptic fit.

Nero

Nero lives on in legend as a capricious tyrant, but he does seem to have had some kind of coherent view of himself as emperor even if his model was Hellenistic rather than Roman. He probably envisaged himself living in immense splendour, enjoying a role as cultural patron. He certainly had some modest talent as a poet and musician and a genuine interest in Greek art, and he inspired what has been seen as a minor renaissance of poetry and prose writing. One of the poets of his age, Lucan, from Spain (AD 39–65), is remembered for his poem *Pharsalia* that tells of the civil war between Caesar and Pompey. (As with others, a close relationship with Nero soured and eventually Lucan was forced to commit suicide at the age of 25.) However, there remained prejudice against the customs of the east. When Nero founded Greek games, the Neronia, in 60, he shocked the more traditional Romans by competing in them himself and then compounded the embarrassment by expecting senators to join in as well. More seriously in Roman eyes, Nero had no military experience and showed no interest in acquiring any. The maintenance of good order in the army was left to the initiative of local commanders. (A respected biography is *Nero: The End of a Dynasty*, by Miriam Griffin, London, 1984. This should be supplemented by Edward Champlin's acclaimed *Nero*, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 2003, which seeks to create a more sympathetic approach to the emperor.)

For the first years of his reign this did not matter so much. Claudius had left a stable and well-governed empire. In his leading adviser, Seneca, and the Praetorian Prefect, Burrus, Nero was well served. Between them they forced Agrippina out of the imperial palace and Seneca made conciliatory speeches to the senate that helped to smooth relationships there. In contrast to what followed these were looked on later as golden years.

Seneca is remembered as the most articulate proponent of Roman Stoicism. As has been seen (p. 352), the Stoics saw the world as one community, a single brotherhood, evolving under the benevolent care of a presiding force. The individual was both part of this force and yet also subject to it. Within a framework that he could not control he nevertheless had a role in helping to bring the whole to fruition. Unlike the Epicureans, for instance, the Stoic had a duty to take part in public life, to uphold the moral order when he could, and to endure the unfolding of events when he could not. This philosophy fitted well with traditional Roman

ideals: service to the state, whatever the cost, frugality, and respect for the divine order. Virgil's Aeneas is a model of the Stoic virtues of courage, loyalty, resolution, and piety.

Stoicism was essentially a conservative and paternalistic philosophy. Stoics were expected to treat their slaves well but there was never any suggestion that slavery itself should be abolished in the name of the brotherhood of man. Yet Stoicism could also inspire resistance. The model in the republic was Cato of Utica (95–46 BC) who was unflinching in his defence of the senate and republican ideals, committing suicide when he heard of Caesar's triumph over the old order. Later Stoics offered resistance to those emperors who seemed determined to upset the natural evolution of the world by their tyrannical behaviour. Both Nero and Domitian were to face the opposition of Stoics (though it has long been debated as to whether Stoics resisted because they were Stoics or became Stoics to steel their resistance).

The Stoic could appear stern and unbending. The importance of Seneca is that he humanized Stoicism. (Some, looking at his great wealth and his enjoyment of power under Nero, argue that he was all too human.) He wrote voluminously and not only on philosophy. His works include poetry and tragedies as well as scientific treatises (his main work on science, *Naturales Questiones*, was an undisputed authority until the works of Aristotle were rediscovered), and even a satire on the reign of Claudius. His philosophical works deal with such topics as anger, clemency, and what is meant by happiness. It is in his letters to his friend Lucilius, 124 of which survive, that he is most approachable. They present the ideals of Stoicism in an easy conversational style and relate them to actual events, the destruction of the city of Lugdunum (Lyon) in a fire, the everyday treatment of slaves, and how to deal with the unsettling effects of large crowds.

The hopes that Seneca would ensure stability of government proved an illusion. Nero was still very young, inexperienced, and with a childhood which had been poisoned by the morbid tensions and rivalries of the imperial family. Some of his behaviour, escapades through the streets of Rome at night, for instance, was probably no more than adolescent high spirits, and it is hardly surprising that he became impatient with his sober advisers. (Seneca was attacked publicly in 58 with the pointed challenge of explaining how his philosophical beliefs had allowed him to accumulate so much wealth.) Gradually, however, Nero's activities became more sinister. In 59, egged on by his mistress Poppaea, he decided to murder his mother. After the first attempt to drown her in a collapsible boat ended in farce she was beaten to death. In a sense this was Nero's coming of age, but the murder of a woman who was so dominant in his life must have left him with an immense psychological burden.

Soon a reign of terror began. Nero's wife Octavia and, probably, Burrus were among the victims. Seneca was dismissed and later forced to commit suicide. (Whatever can be said of Seneca's lifestyle, his death as recounted by Tacitus is an exemplar for all Stoics and became a favourite subject in western art.) When a fire destroyed much of Rome in 64 it was soon rumoured that Nero had started it. He almost certainly did not but he used as a scapegoat the small Greek-speaking

Christian community of the city and persecuted them so brutally that he simply did his own image further damage.

Nero's resplendent response to the devastated centre of Rome was the building of a vast imperial palace, the *Domus Aurea*, the 'Golden House', which covered the centre of Rome and was fronted by an immense statue of the emperor. The coinage was debased to help pay for the cost. Wags commented that the citizens of Rome would have to move out to Veii to make room for the vast palace, unless, of course, it extended that far as well! Inside it was sumptuous. 'Everything', Suetonius tells us, 'was covered in gold, decorated with gems and shells. The dining rooms had ceilings with ivory panels that were moveable and had openings from which flowers and perfumes issued forth.' Statues looted from Greece, among them the Dying Gaul from Pergamum, filled the alcoves. The delicately painted walls survived into the sixteenth century and proved an inspiration to Renaissance artists who were let down on ropes into the now darkened and humid rooms to copy them. (An imperial bath had been built over the ruins by the emperor Trajan.)

By now lax control at the centre of the empire was having its impact in the provinces. In Britain the callous insensitivity of a procurator had led to a massive uprising by the Iceni tribe under their chieftain, Boudicca, probably in 60. The ashes of the destruction of Colchester can still be seen in the archaeological record. Control was only regained at the cost of terrible retribution. In 62 a Roman army was once again humiliated by the Parthians and it took a major show of force to achieve a compromise through which Armenia was stabilized as a buffer state between Rome and the Parthian empire with the Romans forced to recognize a Parthian prince, Tiridates, as its ruler. Most formidable of all was a Jewish revolt, set off in 66 by the clumsy behaviour of a Greek governor, appointed under the influence of Poppaea. A million died in the following years as it was suppressed. This provincial unrest was masked by an extravagant display of feasting and games in 66 when Tiridates was received in Rome and formally accepted as a client king. Nero presented what was in effect a setback for Roman power in the east as a triumph for himself. In the east he was to be known as 'Lord and Saviour of the World'.

Within Rome pressure on Nero was increasing. Several plots were hatched against him, many involving respectable senators, but Nero managed to foil them all, eliminating many of his finest administrators in the process. The most effective commander of the age, and a hero to Tacitus, was Domitius Corbulo, who had not only kept order on the German frontier but then had managed a brilliant campaign in Armenia which restored Roman prestige there. Nero grew increasingly jealous of his success and ordered him to commit suicide in 67. Three other provincial governors were killed. Nero must have sensed how vulnerable his lack of military experience left him. Among the motives was his desire to increase his wealth. It was said that he had the six richest men in Africa killed so that he could gain their land, apparently half of the province, for himself.

It may have been to escape the atmosphere of hatred that the emperor decided to head east in the hope of finding an audience that would genuinely respond to his

need for applause. Throughout 67 Nero toured Greece, attending the ancient games that he had rescheduled to fit in with his itinerary. Whether performing as charioteer, orator, or lyre player, he inevitably had to be awarded first prize by the overawed judges. Much of this tour was farcical but it was also the first time an emperor had taken a personal interest in Greek culture and perhaps marks the moment when the Greeks began to feel part of the empire (see also Interlude 8). When he returned to Rome, laden with the crowns of his victories, Nero, significantly, celebrated with a show staged as a military triumph. Any residual loyalty in the army must have been undermined by this desecration of the most prestigious ceremony in Roman political life.

There was also increasing revulsion among provincial aristocrats at Nero's unworthiness. It was fuelled by discontent over high taxes imposed to finance his rebuilding of Rome. In 68 a revolt broke out in Gaul. It was led by Gaius Julius Vindex, a Romanized Celtic aristocrat who was governor of Gallia Lugdunensis. He seems to have been appalled at the threat Nero offered to traditional Roman dignity. 'He has despoiled the whole Roman world, he has destroyed the flower of the senate, he debauched and killed his mother and does not preserve even the semblance of sovereignty.' Vindex then established links with the governor of one of the Spanish provinces, the 71-year-old Servius Sulpicius Galba. Galba was acclaimed as *imperator* by his troops. According to Suetonius, Nero heard of the revolt on the anniversary of his mother's death. Firm action might have saved him: the troops of Vindex were attacked by the Rhine legions and easily scattered and Galba had only one legion (although he soon raised another). However, with the fantasy world he had built around himself now crumbling, Nero panicked and set off towards the east, perhaps in a last hope that he would be welcomed there. The senate and the Praetorian Guard (once again rewarded handsomely for their pains) rallied to Galba and proclaimed him the new emperor. Nero, waiting in a suburban villa for a boat to take him from Italy, killed himself.

AD 69: A Long Year of Revolt

With Nero died the last of the Julio-Claudians. He had no obvious successor within the family and the imperial throne was there to be fought over. Autocratic rule was now the established order, no one proposed any alternative system of government, and the senate did little more than react to events. Galba threw away his advantage. He was slow to reach Rome, refused to spend money to consolidate his position, and offended almost every potential supporter. By early 69 the legions along the Rhine had revolted and declared their own candidate for the throne, the governor of the province of Lower Germany, Aulus Vitellius. In Rome, however, one of Galba's leading supporters, Marcus Salvius Otho, the governor of Lusitania and, incidentally, former husband of Nero's Poppaea, was so frustrated by events, especially when a younger senator was proposed as Galba's heir, that he won over the Praetorian

Guard, who proclaimed him emperor, and then used the Guards to assassinate Galba in the Forum.

It now looked as if the bad days of the republic were back with two rival army commanders fighting over the spoils of the empire. With the Julio-Claudian dynasty extinguished there was no other way of determining the succession. The conflict between Vitellius and Otho appeared to be shaping up as one between east and west. Vitellius had the support of Spain, Gaul, and Britain, Otho of Italy, Africa, and the east. In the event the war ended quickly. Vitellius' troops invaded Italy and defeated Otho at Cremona in April. Otho committed suicide. The senate dutifully proclaimed Vitellius emperor.

In his turn, however, Vitellius threw away his victory. He never built up any support beyond the legions of the Rhine and yet another contender was allowed to come forward. This was Titus Flavius Vespasianus. The background of Vespasian's family was modest. His Italian grandfather had been a centurion, his father a tax collector in Asia. Nero had appointed him commander to suppress the revolt in Judaea precisely because his provincial origins made him an unlikely rival. Yet Vespasian had already had a dazzlingly successful career, first as a commander in the invasion of Britain, then as consul, and subsequently as governor of Africa. He was first proclaimed emperor by the prefect of Egypt but he found the border legions of the Danube and Syria and his own legions in Judaea and Egypt rallying to him. He made his way to Egypt knowing that he could exert pressure on Rome through threatening its grain supply.

Meanwhile the legions of the Danube had taken the initiative. They marched down into Italy, defeating Vitellius' army almost at the same spot where Vitellius had defeated Otho. In a passage worthy of Thucydides, Tacitus details the appalling slaughter the victorious troops unleashed on the town of Cremona. They continued on to Rome, where civil war had broken out between the supporters of Vitellius and those of Vespasian. The Praetorian Guard, whose fickle allegiance was now to Vitellius, was wiped out and peace was finally restored by one of Vespasian's supporters, the governor of Syria, Mucianus, who had arrived in Italy with his legions. Mucianus' allegiance had been won by the existence of Vespasian's two sons, the elder of whom, Titus, had already made a name for himself. Here was the possibility of dynastic stability. Vespasian was in his turn recognized by the senate, but showed what little respect he had for their role by dating his reign from his proclamation by the troops in Egypt. In a decree the senate meekly accepted that everything that had already been enacted by Vespasian should be legally binding.

What perhaps was most remarkable about the political struggles of the year 69 was how little they shook the institutions of the empire. Vespasian was a usurper, 'an emperor', in Tacitus' celebrated phrase, 'made elsewhere than at Rome', but he fitted without difficulty into the imperial framework. There is no evidence of any hesitation in the way the senate granted him the rights of the earlier emperors to convene and make proposals to the senators and to put forward the magistrates for formal acceptance by the increasingly impotent popular assemblies.

The Flavian Emperors

There were three Flavian emperors, Vespasian (69–79) and his sons Titus (79–81) and Domitian (81–96). They personified a new phase in the development of the empire, one when the emperor could come from outside the traditional noble families of Rome and make his way to power through sheer merit. Vespasian was not to disappoint. He was the first emperor since Augustus to maintain good relationships with those varied constituencies, the senate, the army, and the people of Rome. Although severe in tone and cautious with his spending, he also had a sound awareness of what the empire needed—the definition of boundaries, stable provincial government, and a widening of citizenship so that its subjects could be progressively drawn into loyalty.

Nero's reign and the disruption of the year 69 had left the empire unsettled. In Judaea Vespasian's son, Titus, brought the revolt to a bloody end with the capture of Jerusalem in 70. The harrowing account by the Jewish historian Josephus of the slaughter within the city (in his *The Jewish War*) sits uneasily with accounts of Titus as a kindly man, even though there is some evidence that his troops went further in their retaliation than he had intended. Elsewhere the most restless provinces were in the north-west, in Britain and along the Rhine, where the shattering of Vitellius' legions had left the Roman presence weaker and encouraged revolt. On the Rhine border the auxiliary troops, raised from local peoples, defected *en masse* and rallied to one Julius Civilis, a native of Germany. Julius incited local nobles to proclaim a local 'Gallic' empire. It is unclear what his motives were. In the event the empire proved to be a fantasy and soon collapsed. Nevertheless it took eight legions to restore order. These legions were then transferred to Britain, where they moved to the north, to subdue the powerful tribe of the Brigantes, and westwards into the Welsh mountains. In the early 70s the modern cities of York, Chester, and Carlisle were founded.

It was in the reigns of Vespasian and Domitian that the German borders were defined by permanent barriers. (The provinces of Upper and Lower Germany were formally constituted in the 80s.) Archaeologists have been able to plot the stages by which Roman control was pushed northwards and eastwards from the Rhine so as to forge better communications in the difficult territory between the Rhine and the Danube. A *limes*, a road, was cut through the forest with observation towers every 500 or 600 metres and small forts between them. By the 90s, if not earlier, it was complete. It was manned by auxiliary forces who had been reconstituted under Roman officers after the revolts of the early 70s.

As the borders were stabilized there was a gradual shift of troops from Britain and the Rhine frontier towards the Danube. There was a threat here from the Dacians. The Dacians were well established as agriculturalists in the plain of Transylvania, north of the Danube, and also exploited the iron, gold, and silver of the Carpathian mountains north of the plain. A self-confident chieftain, Decabalus, had united the local tribes under his control and shown that he had no fear of

Roman power. The threat he offered meant that attempts by the governor of Britain, Agricola, to conquer Scotland had to be curtailed. A temporary fortress built in wood on the banks of the river Tay at Inchtuthil was abandoned (and, archaeological evidence suggests, dismantled about 88) and one of the four legions in Britain was transferred to the Danube some time between 85 and 92. Tacitus' biography of Agricola portrays the retreat as a betrayal typical of Domitian's high-handedness, but the conquest of the Scottish Highlands was hardly feasible at a time of danger elsewhere and Domitian's decision seems wise. Domitian was able to conduct a war against Decabalus in 88 and reduce him to the status of client king.

Vespasian was known for his distaste of extravagance but his political instincts told him when it was justified. It was during his reign that one of the great surviving monuments of ancient Rome, the Colosseum, was begun. Amphitheatres were the largest constructions undertaken by the Romans. Most were built to house 15,000–20,000 spectators though some, such as the well-preserved examples at Thysdrus (modern El Djem) in Africa and Verona, could take 30,000. The Colosseum with a capacity of 50,000 dwarfed them all. Its building was remarkable in many ways. It was built over the site of an artificial lake constructed by Nero for his Golden House, yet the foundations were laid so successfully that there is still, 2,000 years later, no trace of settlement. (By restoring land taken by Nero from the city of Rome Vespasian was in effect returning to the people what they considered theirs, and when he created a temple to Peace to commemorate his victories in Judaea, he transferred works of art from the Golden House to it.) The building could take in and disperse its thousands of spectators efficiently while also containing the victims, both animal and human, of the slaughter they had come to see. The construction work was so effectively organized that the Colosseum was ready for service just ten years after its inception. The emperor Titus was able to throw a hundred days of inaugural games, one of which involved the sacrifice of 5,000 animals. (It was a display of munificence that proved typical of Titus' short reign. Faced with a disastrous fire in Rome, the destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum by the eruption of Vesuvius, and plague in Italy, he proved particularly generous in his relief of suffering.) (See Mary Beard and Keith Hopkins, *The Colosseum*, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 2005.)

By the first century AD, gladiator fights predominated at the games. These combats had originated in republican times, at funerals. There appears to have been a belief that the souls of the dead needed to be propitiated by human blood. A staged armed contest provided the blood. Gradually the combats became more ostentatious and figured among the public entertainments offered by aspiring politicians. Under Augustus the shows, even those held outside Rome, became associated with the largesse of the emperor and an essential part of his patronage (partly no doubt to prevent ambitious nobles upstaging him). At the dedication of the Colosseum Titus had 3,000 gladiators on hand and Trajan celebrated his victory over the Dacians with 123 days of games with a total of 10,000 men involved. Alongside men came a constant need for animals—tiger, crocodile, giraffe, lynx, rhinoceros—the more exotic the better so that ever more bizarre battles between men and beasts (these animal shows were known as *venationes*) could be staged.

The world of the gladiator was a strange one. Many gladiators were condemned criminals and their deaths in the arena simply a form of execution, others were prisoners of war or former slaves. They were carefully trained by a *lanista*, who might be a retired gladiator himself, and in the arena could be presented in various ways. The *murmillio* was heavily armed with a long shield, visored helmet, and a short sword, the *retiarius* wore hardly any armour but had a net and trident, while the Thracian had a round shield and a carved scimitar. Successful gladiators would become celebrities and their skills might earn them pardons, even when they had been technically defeated in a battle, so that they went on to have distinguished careers from one games to the next. The courage involved and the aura of physical strength and sexual potency was so powerful that many ordinary Romans were attracted by the profession. Senators and equestrians had to be forbidden by law from debasing themselves in this way. (See E. Kohne and C. Ewigleben, *Gladiators and Caesars: The Power of Spectacle in Ancient Rome*, Berkeley and London, 2000 for full details, with illustrations.)

Alongside the southern side of the Palatine Hill where the emperors had their palaces was the Circus Maximus, founded in Rome by the Etruscans as a circuit for chariot racing. It is now a deserted and rather desolate site and it is hard to imagine that in its final form, in about AD 105, it was over 600 metres long and 140 wide with a capacity for 150,000 spectators, three times the number who could fit into the nearby Colosseum. ‘It amazes me,’ wrote Pliny the Younger, a senator and provincial governor, ‘that thousands and thousands of grown men should be like children, wanting to look at horses running and men standing on chariots again and again,’ but they did. In a typical day’s racing there would be twenty-four races and, with four horses to a chariot, each race would need forty-eight horses, over 1,150 in total. The demand for horses was so heavy, in fact, that whole herds of wild horses were set aside to help the emperors to meet it. The tight circuit and the use of four horses to a chariot ensured that this was a risky sport but it must have been thrilling to watch. As with most aspects of Roman life the proceedings were highly ritualized, with processions of the gods before the contests began and ceremonies to mark the victories of the drivers who, like successful gladiators, became major celebrities.

The gladiatorial contests and other games were not simply shows for the public’s amusement. They were also political events, ones in which the emperor confronted his people in a way which was no longer possible elsewhere now that the popular assemblies had lost their powers. (There is no record of the *concilium plebis* meeting after the end of the century.) The emperor was expected to attend (at the Circus Maximus he had a box on the edge of the Palatine Hill), be attentive to the proceedings, and listen to any complaints expressed by the crowd. In his decision as to whether to allow wounded gladiators to live or die he exercised an absolute power. ‘It was,’ as Keith Hopkins remarks, ‘a dramatic enactment of imperial power repeated several times a day before a mass audience of citizens, conquerors of the world.’

The emperors fulfilled their role with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Augustus was always correct and punctilious in his attendance, aware that Caesar had attracted a bad reputation by conducting his official correspondence while in his box.

He actually enjoyed the games. Tiberius was less enthusiastic and attended only out of duty, while Gaius, typically, lost his temper when he felt the crowd was paying more attention to the gladiators than to himself. Claudius, on the other hand, was so excited about the games that his behaviour was considered to lack the decorum required of an emperor.

Like Claudius before him, Vespasian involved equestrians more fully in the administration of the empire but he appears to have done this without offending the sensitivities of senators. The equestrian class was large and drawn from the same wealthy and educated landowning groups as the senators. It thus represented no threat to the established order. Equestrians were much more socially acceptable as administrators to the provincial notables than freedmen and it made good sense to draw on their skills, a process which was to continue over the next centuries. While Vespasian did this without losing his good relationship with the senate, Domitian, who was altogether less sensitive than his father, flaunted his use of equestrians, even allowing them to sit in judgement over senators. It was only one of many ways in which he earned the hatred of the senators. He was arrogant and autocratic by nature, preferring to be addressed as 'Lord God'. He took the old republican office of censor, with its right to control the membership of the senate, permanently, and he used it to rid himself of those he disliked or feared. He was particularly suspicious of foreign cults such as Judaism and Christianity but his increasing absolutism also aroused opposition from conventional senators inspired by Stoicism. Such a man was better appreciated by the army, and outside Rome the empire was well administered and maintained. However, the antagonism to Domitian in Rome itself became so acute that a conspiracy to kill him was hatched by disaffected senators, the Praetorian Prefects, and members of his own household. He was stabbed to death within the grand palace he had built for himself on the Palatine Hill in September 96 (for the palace, see further p. 537). In its exultation the senate ordered that every reference to him on public monuments should be erased.

Trajan: The Model Emperor

The conspirators had been shrewd enough to designate a successor, Marcus Cocceius Nerva, an elderly senator of impeccable lineage whose career had been one of modest achievement but whose geniality and mildness had offended no one. It was felt he could be trusted to deal well with the senate and provide a period of calm after the terror of Domitian's last years. He succeeded. He was conciliatory and unobtrusive, attempting in his short reign to stabilize the empire's finances and restore good working relations between the emperor, senate, and people of Italy (whose tax burden he seems to have lightened). Whether he would have survived in the long term is more questionable and his wisest move was to have a strong successor already adopted as his son and installed as joint emperor by the time of his death in January 98. The possibility of adopting a male heir when there was no legitimate

one was an important development although it did not supplant the preference of emperors to found a dynasty if an heir existed.

The new emperor was Marcus Ulpius Traianus, known to history as Trajan. Trajan's family was not unknown among the ruling families of Rome, as his father had been a consul and governor of Syria, but its origins were not Italian but long-established settler stock in Spain. His accession marked a further widening of the circle from which emperors could be drawn and once again the choice proved more than justified. Trajan was to be extolled down the ages as the ideal emperor, the monarch that medieval rulers took as their example. He intertwined respect for the emperor with that for the traditional gods of Rome. He adopted Hercules, with his image of perpetual labour for the good of the community, as his model but also allowed himself to be portrayed on his coins with Jupiter. Temples to Jupiter built in his reign typically also display a dedication to the emperor. (Julian Bennett, *Trajan: Optimus Princeps*, 2nd edition, London, 2001.)

When he was appointed emperor Trajan was governor of Upper Germany and it is interesting that he lingered there for over a year before returning to Rome. Ostensibly he was securing the borders but he was probably boosting his reputation as a military commander, now that that seemed an essential attribute of a successful emperor. (It would give him prestige with the senators and the support of troops who could effectively forestall a challenge to him.) It was a sign, too, that the business of an emperor was no longer necessarily centred on Rome. Trajan marks the shift towards the emperor as one who is expected to confront Rome's enemies in person. He was back again in the north for the winter of 98–9 and then again in 101 to launch an invasion of Dacia.

The senator Pliny, who had shared the common hatred of his class for Domitian, rejoiced at this new emperor and eulogized him for the efficient way he dealt with his business:

We see how he meets the desires of the provinces and even the requests of individual cities. He makes no difficulty about giving them a hearing or delaying in replying. They come into his presence promptly and are dismissed promptly, and at last the emperor's doors are no longer besieged by a mob of embassies who have been shut out. (Translation: Betty Radice)

A famous correspondence between Trajan and Pliny, when the latter was governor of Bithynia and Pontus, illustrates Trajan's attention to the smallest detail. He shows no irritation in dealing with a range of queries. He was assiduous in intervening in the affairs of cities, settling disputes and telling them how to arrange their affairs. He was in fact a paternalist, and the most famous example of his concern is the system of *alimenta* instituted by him in Italy. Farmers could apply for loans from the imperial treasury at 5 per cent interest (instead of the usual 12 per cent). The interest was then placed in a special account and used to pay for grain rations for the children of the poor.

Trajan also proved to be the last great conqueror of the Roman empire. His reasons for extending Roman rule over Dacia, the kingdom north of the Danube, and into Parthia, where he added two new provinces to the empire, may be linked

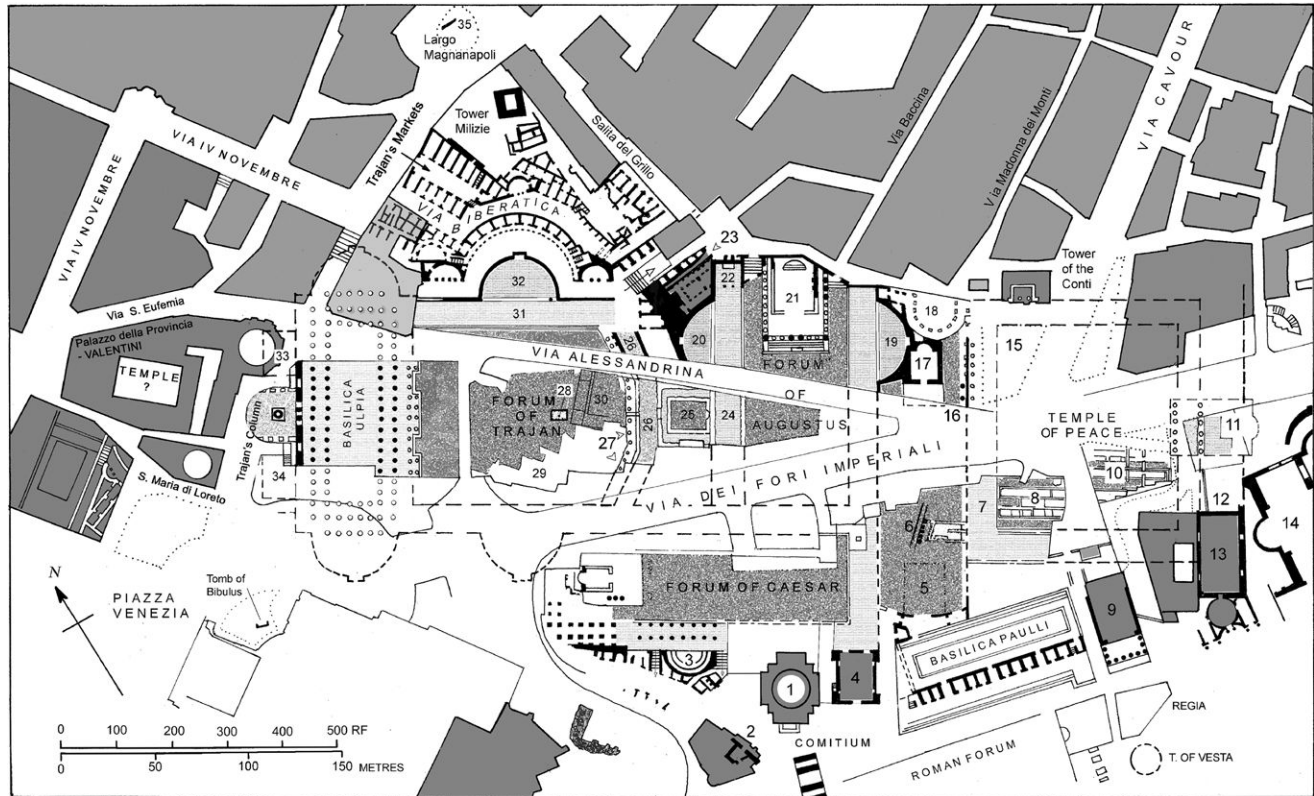


FIG. 7 The Imperial Fora. Trajan used the plunder of his Dacian campaign to construct an enormous new Forum, complete with basilica and library, to the north of those fora already constructed in memory of Caesar (*Forum Iulium*) and by Augustus to commemorate his victories. Key (selected). Mamertime Prison. 4: Senate House. 9: Temple of Divus Antoninus (AD 140). 17: Temple of Minerva. 19–20: Exedras of Augustus' Forum. 12, 15: Park and main hall of Temple of Peace (inaugurated ad 75, rebuilt 190s). 21: Temple of Mars Ultor. 31–2: Exedra and Porticus of Trajan's Forum. 33–4: Trajan's Libraries.

to his desire to enhance his military reputation. However, the campaigns were also justifiable on the grounds that both kingdoms offered a threat to Rome. Decabalus was still set on revenge for his defeat by Domitian and probably no emperor could have left him unchallenged. Trajan fought two wars in Dacia, in 101–2 and 105–6. The first war ended in an armed truce, the second in the complete defeat of the Dacians. Decabalus' royal palace was sacked, he himself was killed, and his head sent back in triumph to Rome. Following it was plunder in silver and gold on a scale reminiscent of the great republican conquests. Scenes from the campaign—the bridging of the Danube, the assault on the Dacian capital, the setting up of camp—are portrayed on Trajan's column, which still stands in Rome. It provides the most vivid picture to survive of the Roman army in action but also highlights the emperor as *imperator*, the victorious general. Dacia was incorporated as a province in 106 and the Transylvanian plain soon attracted settlers.

In the east Trajan had strengthened the frontier in 106 by incorporating Nabataea into the empire as the new province of Arabia. The Nabataeans, an Arabic people, had cornered the luxury trade of the Arabian desert, myrrh, frankincense, and spices, and had grown rich on it. Their capital, Petra, remains one of the most fascinating cities of the ancient empire. Nestling in a hollow in the hills close to the main trade route between Aqaba and Gaza on the Mediterranean coast, their king Aretas IV (9 BC–AD 40), a client king of the empire, had carved an astonishing range of buildings out of the multi-coloured rock and the city was served by a sophisticated water system that allowed the limited and irregular rainfall of the region to be channelled into reservoirs.

When a new dispute with Parthia over Armenia arose in 110 the extension of the empire's border made an invasion of Parthia all the easier. Whether the emperor, now buoyed up by his success in Dacia, was simply after glory (as the original sources suggest) or whether he was prudently aiming at the cowing of another enemy of Rome remains disputed. In its early days the campaign was a success. Armenia was overrun and made into a province and then Trajan extended Roman control over Mesopotamia, established as another province, and further south towards the Persian Gulf. As with other Roman commanders Trajan's model was Alexander, and when at the end of his Parthian campaign (116) he reached the mouth of the Euphrates he is said to have wept that he could go no further and equal the exploits of his hero. It was simply not feasible to do so. The newly incorporated territories were restless and there was also trouble elsewhere in the empire, tribal uprisings in Britain, a Jewish rebellion, and unrest on the lower Danube. In any case Trajan was ailing. He died in 117.

Hadrian

The succession of the next emperor, Hadrian (ruled 117–38), proved controversial. Hadrian was a cousin of Trajan's (and also his great-nephew by marriage). He claimed that he had been officially designated as his successor by Trajan on his

deathbed. He was certainly the most favoured of Trajan's associates, held consular rank, and was commander of the forces in Syria (to whom he immediately offered a double bonus payment on Trajan's death). Yet the senate was shocked to hear the news. No emperor had ever died outside Italy, and many suspected a coup, especially when other claimants were eliminated. It is not known whether Hadrian was directly involved in these deaths but they did nothing to restore his reputation with the senate and the relationship remained troubled for the rest of his reign. (The biography by Anthony Birley, *Hadrian: The Restless Emperor*, London and New York, 1997, is superb.)

There were other reasons why the relationship may never have worked. Hadrian was a versatile but restless man. His character has proved impossible to fathom. 'Changeable, manifold, fickle, born as if to be a judge of vice and virtues, controlling his passionate spirit by some kind of artifice, he expertly concealed his envious, unhappy and wanton character, immoderate in his urge for display; feigning self-restraint, affability and mildness and disguising his desire for glory' was the account of one who was clearly exasperated by him. He was certainly much happier away from Rome. No less than twelve of his twenty-one years of rule were spent in the provinces. After two or three years in the capital he embarked on a tour that lasted five years. It took in Gaul, the German border, Britain, Spain, Mauretania, and finally two years in Greece, the emperor's favourite part of the empire. He returned to Italy in 126 but between 128 and 134 he was away again. This time his travels included Greece but also Egypt and Palestine. When his beloved favourite Antinous was drowned in the Nile, Hadrian decreed that he should be worshipped as a god. Throughout the empire thousands of statues of Antinous were produced, as permanent reminders of the emperor's loss. In Palestine he refounded Jerusalem, a deserted site since 70, as a Roman colony. (The intrusion onto this sacred site led to yet another Jewish uprising, suppressed in the usual ruthless way.)

Hadrian is remembered above all as a builder. In Rome there is the Pantheon, and his mausoleum (now the Castel San Angelo). Outside Rome is his villa at Tivoli where his eastern tastes were allowed full sway. (See further Interlude 9.) However, he was a benefactor throughout the empire. Many cities, particularly those in the east, enjoyed his patronage (200 individual benefactions in no less than 150 cities have been recorded) and Athens gained a whole new suburb through his generosity (see below, p. 452 for further details). In short, his patronage was critical in fostering the integration of the Greek provinces more fully into the empire. It is telling that on the front of the cuirass in which the emperor was shown in many of his statues, Athena appears as a warrior being crowned by two Victories while she stands on the back of a wolf that is suckling Romulus and Remus. (M. T. Boatwright, *Hadrian and the Cities of the Roman Empire*, Princeton and London, 2000, details the building projects.)

However, Hadrian was more than just a builder and cultural inspiration. He recognized that the empire was becoming overstretched and it was vital that it should be settled within defensible frontiers. He quickly surrendered Trajan's conquests in the east (it may have been this that affronted the senators who conspired against

him) and established the first unbroken border fortifications. A wooden palisade was constructed between the Rhine and the Danube and this was followed by one of his most famous creations, Hadrian's Wall, crossing northern Britain from sea to sea. One of the implications of the settled borders was that the army's role became more limited and thus there was a risk of declining morale. Hadrian understood this and there are surviving accounts of him inspecting troops and insisting on regular manoeuvres to maintain discipline.

One consequence of Hadrian's continuous travels was that imperial decision-making was consolidated independently of the senate in Rome. When they were in Rome the more sensitive emperors worked with the senate. The normal practice was for the emperor to outline a desired policy and for the senate then to accede to it. The fiction was maintained that the senate was involved in the making of policy (and it continued to make decisions on its own account when the emperor was not present). However, by Hadrian's reign it is clear that the emperor's decisions on matters brought to him directly were now also considered to have the force of law. Such decisions were known as rescripts and some of Hadrian's are quoted in Justinian's great Digest of Roman law (see p. 658). The range of matters an emperor dealt with was wide and there was certainly no area of public life to which the senate could any longer claim exclusivity. A possibly ironical comment attributed to Tacitus sums it up well. 'What need is there for long speeches in the senate when the top people come swiftly to agreement? What need for endless harangues at public meetings, now that policy is settled not by the inexperienced masses but by a supremely wise man and one alone?' Increasingly the magistracies became ceremonial posts whose main function was the demanding one of distributing largesse and games. The philosopher Epictetus wrote:

If you want to be consul you must give up your sleep, run around, kiss men's hands... send gifts to many and daily tokens to some. And what is the result? Twelve bundles of rods [the fasces carried by the twelve lictors [the consul's attendants]], sitting three or four times in the tribunal, giving games in the circus and distributing meals in little baskets.

These posts were, however, important as stepping-stones to governorships and military commands.

One of the most intriguing features of the busts of Hadrian is that his earlobes are shown with creases. It is only recently that this has been recognized as a known symptom of heart disease, and he certainly experienced a steady decline in his health over the last two years of his life. His earlier plans to find an heir having failed, he secured the succession by adopting a respected senator, Antoninus Pius, as he became known when emperor. He ensured the succession in the longer term by ordering Antoninus to adopt two promising young men who would succeed indeed as joint emperors in 161 (as Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, see below, p. 558). For once these successions took place smoothly, none of the legions or the senate offering any murmur of dissent.

The contrast between Hadrian and his successor Antoninus Pius (emperor 138–61) could not have been greater. Antoninus, whose family originated in Nîmes

in Gaul but whose father and grandfather had been consuls in Rome, was already in his fifties when he succeeded. He had been a proconsul in Asia and an adviser of Hadrian. His reign was a peaceful one. The only recorded campaign was an unsuccessful attempt to conquer Scotland (the so-called Antonine Wall was built to the north of Hadrian's but abandoned twenty years later). Antoninus remained in Rome, 'like a spider in the centre of a web', as one observer put it, and ruled autocratically but benevolently. His achievements were recognized by his adopted son Marcus Aurelius in his *Meditations*. 'Nowhere harsh, merciless or blustering but everything nicely calculated and divided into its times as by a leisured man; no bustle, complete order, strength, consistency.'

The 'Good' Emperor

There was by this time a paradigm of a good emperor. An adviser to the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius, Marcus Cornelius Fronto, listed his duties as follows: 'to correct the injustices of the law; to send letters to all parts of the globe; to bring compulsion to bear on kings of foreign nations; to repress by edicts the faults of the provincials, give praise to good actions, quell the seditious and terrify the fierce ones.'

These were pragmatic duties. Much of an emperor's work lay in the day-to-day management of the tensions between rival generals and governors inevitable in such an enormous empire. The appropriate pressures could only be applied successfully if the emperor radiated *auctoritas*, an aura of competence, even transcendence. This has to be built up through the demeanour he showed in public. In a panegyric he wrote to the emperor Trajan when selected as consul in AD 100, Pliny talks of the importance of *abstinentia*, 'restraint'. In principle, for instance, the emperor enjoyed absolute power but it was recognized that he should not abuse it. In the tradition established by Augustus, he must maintain the pretence, and by now it was only a pretence, that republican values survived. He should be sensitive to those with ancient privileges, such as senators, and make sure that they, and the equestrians, should have first call on administrative posts. (Claudius offended this class by relying so heavily on freedmen.) He should never lose his self-control. There is a famous account of a much later emperor, Constantius II, visiting Rome for the first time in his life in 357. He was clearly overwhelmed by the experience but onlookers noted how he struggled to keep his amazement to himself. An emotional reaction in public would have been unforgivable.

The ideal emperor is portrayed on a fine set of reliefs of Marcus Aurelius that celebrate his defeat of the German tribes. They date from the late 170s. Three are now displayed in the Palazzo dei Conservatori in Rome while another eight remain incorporated in the Arch of Constantine in Rome. They cover every aspect of an emperor's duties. So one shows Marcus Aurelius enjoying a triumph in Rome, in another he is ready to sacrifice at the temple of the Capitoline (the only depiction we have of that temple). On others, he extends clemency to defeated enemies and

gives out poor relief. He is seen addressing troops and distributing justice as well as conducting the rituals of sacrifice designated for when leaving a city and when initiating a military campaign. The very quality of these reliefs shows the importance of imperial propaganda, as Augustus, Trajan, and Hadrian had also recognized. The exercise of these duties made up an emperor's *civilitas*, his civic virtue.

The army expected the emperor to be 'one of them', sharing the hardships of campaign and rewarding their victories as appropriate. Pliny praises Trajan for his ability to remember the names of his soldiers, the acts of bravery they had performed, and the wounds they had suffered. While there were exceptions, such as Gaius and Claudius, some form of military command was essential if an emperor was to gain any kind of respect. Gaius may not have cared but Claudius did his best to fabricate the image of conqueror. If the image failed, there were always generals with troops at hand who would take their chance to seize power as Vespasian had in AD 69. From now on, however, following the shift of perspective enjoined by Hadrian, the military challenges would be those of defence, not those of expansion. It could be said that from now on emperors would only fight when they would lose face by not doing so.

The emperor's name was normally linked to the traditional gods of Rome. In the province of Africa it was common for a temple to the three gods of the Capitol, Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva, to be inscribed with the name of the emperor as well, and joint dedications to the Divine Augustus (or another emperor) and Rome were common. Gradually the emperor's name became integrated in all major religious rituals, appropriated as it were as a talisman for the security of the state. By the third century a calendar of festivals celebrated by the garrison at Dura-Europus on the Euphrates, in the far east of the empire, was made up largely of anniversaries of the accessions, deifications, or victories of emperors. (Simon Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor*, Cambridge and New York, 1984 is the classic introduction.)

INTERLUDE 8

The Sebasteion at Aphrodisias

The civil wars of the first century BC had forced many cities in the Greek east to choose between the rival Roman commanders. Aphrodisias in southern Turkey was especially fortunate. As the name suggests, Aphrodisias was home to an ancient shrine to the goddess of love, Aphrodite, the Roman Venus. Julius Caesar claimed direct descent from Venus and with his victory over Pompey in 48 BC Aphrodisias shamelessly played on its heritage with some success. In return Caesar showed it favours, and, after Caesar's death, his great-nephew, Octavian, later the emperor Augustus, was ready to receive the homage of the city as one of his own. More imperial patronage followed and, from being a small settlement, Aphrodisias went through a major expansion in the first century AD. It was lucky to have its own supply of marble and the sculptors of Aphrodisias eventually developed an empire-wide reputation. (Work of theirs has been found in Rome and Leptis Magna.)

The Sebasteion was commissioned by two local families in honour of the Roman emperor as *Sebastos*, 'saviour'. It was begun during the reign of Augustus' successor, Tiberius, partially rebuilt following an earthquake in the reign of Claudius, and probably finished in the early years of the reign of Nero (AD 50s). These emperors were all descendants of the Julio-Claudian family and so this was an offering to them, a continuation of the Hellenistic cults of earlier centuries but now in a completely different context, that of a Mediterranean-wide empire ruled from the west.

The monument consisted of an entrance gateway, an enclosed processional way 90 metres long with columns leading up to a temple at the end. Greek temples normally stood within a large enclosure, the *temenos*, with an altar in front of them. A colonnade leading up to a temple was more typical of the Roman imperial *fora*, the large ceremonial monuments that the emperors created for their self-glorification in Rome. Those of Julius Caesar and Augustus in Rome had similar arrangements and would have been complete before building of the Sebasteion began. As neither of the donor families (in each case we have the names of two brothers) appears to be Roman, they, or their architect, must have visited Rome for inspiration. It is an excellent example of the new cultural interchanges between the Latin west and Greek east that followed the reign of Augustus.

The most spectacular feature of the Sebasteion is the 180 reliefs that were placed on the walls of the colonnade. When the building eventually collapsed in an earthquake they fell face downwards in the soil and so many were preserved. (These are

now displayed in a fine new gallery at Aphrodisias.) The reliefs cover an extraordinary range of 'imperial' themes but the predominant one is compromise and collaboration, an integration of Greek and Roman cultures with the Greek city of Aphrodisias welcoming Roman rule. The emperors are shown as semi-divine alongside a presentation of the imperial family as protectors of a Mediterranean-wide empire against the barbarians. So images of conquest, prosperity, and benevolent rule predominate. The Greeks, the monument assumes, are collaborators in this in that the emperors are now integrated within Greek mythology, especially that of the Olympian gods who figure prominently on the reliefs.

Those Roman emperors who had died before the reliefs were carved are presented nude reflecting their heroic status as gods. They are venerated as victors. So Claudius is shown as conqueror of Britannia who is personified as a woman captive submitting to him. (In reality, as seen earlier, pp. 474–5, he had only taken the submission of the British tribes after his generals had defeated them.) Again Nero presents himself, or is represented, on the reliefs as the victor over Armenia although the Armenians were powerful enough to maintain their independence. Yet the emperors are also bringers of peace. The reliefs depicting Augustus display him as much as a ruler of settled land and safe seas as of conquered barbarians.

Perhaps the most absorbing, and certainly the most technically accomplished of the reliefs (as if it were designed as a show-piece) shows the emperor Nero being crowned by his mother Agrippina. Agrippina was a great-granddaughter of Augustus and niece of the emperor Claudius whom she married as his fourth wife, so bringing her son Nero into the heart of the imperial family. It is the only imperial relief from the Aphrodisias sequence in which an emperor is shown clothed, in military dress. Yet Nero's shoes are in the distinct style worn by senators so here military and civilian are being cleverly combined. Agrippina holds a large cornucopia, the symbol of fertility associated with successful imperial rule, in her left hand. Then there was embarrassment. News must have filtered through of Nero's murder of his mother and his *damnatio* by the senate after his death. The relief had to be taken down and was found buried as a pavement slab. Another portrayal of Nero on the reliefs was defaced.

Close to the reliefs of the emperors are those of the gods. The hero/god Heracles, often a symbol of powerful leadership, appears in six reliefs, Dionysus, the god of wine and abandon, is shown in five. Then there are three reliefs of Apollo, one of them linking him to his oracle site at Delphi. Many other traditional mythological themes appear, Leda and the Swan, Centaurs and Lapiths, Ajax and Cassandra from the siege of Troy, among them. What is shown here is the conventional repertoire of Greek mythology with the emperors linked to it to reflect their own divine status (more easily acceptable in the Greek east). However, a cluster of reliefs from the eastern end of the southern colonnade tie the Sebasteion more tightly to the Romans and, specifically, to the family of Caesar. So the founding of Rome is signalled by a relief of Aeneas fleeing from Troy on his way to Italy and there is one of Romulus and Remus with their wolf. Naturally there is a relief of Aphrodite, here giving birth

to Eros, while another relief shows the personification of a city, undoubtedly Aphrodisias, being crowned by a personification of Rome herself.

Then there are representations of conquered barbarians, the *ethne*—all of whom seem to be tribes or nations conquered by Augustus. There are thirteen of them, as well as three islands, Sicily, Crete, and Cyprus. All are personified as statuesque female figures in bold relief, originally with inscriptions of their provenance on a pedestal below them. The geographical spread is from east to west to show how the emperor had defended all the borders, however far flung. So in the far west are the *Callaeci* of northern Spain, there are several *ethne* from across the Alps and along the Danube, and even a tribe of *Bospori* on the Black Sea. In the far eastern Mediterranean the *Judaei*, *Arabi*, and *Aegyptii* are recorded. These reliefs provide a survey of the sheer diversity of cultures that the Romans had conquered.

In its full glory the Sebasteion must have been a stunning complex to visit. Above all it shows the impact of new relationships that were being forged. The people of Aphrodisias were given a powerful narrative of the empire to which they now belonged, its extent, its rulers, and its mythologies. It worked. Over the next hundred years most of the antagonisms between rival cities in Asia Minor had abated and they were concentrating on magnificent display. Aphrodisias, whose stadium is the largest in the Greek world and still in good condition, was among the most prosperous. (See further Chapter 29.)

In his *Agricola*, Tacitus imagined the speech of a British chieftain to his men. It is Tacitus at his most cynical.

Plunderers of the world, they [the Romans] are, and now, that there is no more territory left to occupy their hands which have already laid the world waste, they are scouring the seas. If the enemy is rich, he is termed greedy; if the enemy is poor, he is dubbed as power hungry. Neither east nor west has been able to sate them. Alone of all men they covet rich nations and poor nations with equal passion. They rob, they slaughter, they plunder—and they call it ‘empire’. Where they make a wasteland they call it ‘peace’. (Translation: Jo-Ann Shelton)

Maintaining Control

As Tacitus acknowledged, the Roman empire had been won and, in the last resort, was held by force. Control was not imposed easily. Spain suffered nearly 200 years of campaigning before it was finally subdued and even provinces that appeared peaceful might still rise in revolt. An example was the great rebellion in Judaea in 66 BC which began with the massacre of a Roman garrison in Caesarea and then spread to the whole of Palestine. It was fuelled by the strong sense of national identity preserved by the Jews and by tensions between rich and poor. By the time Jerusalem was stormed by Titus in 70 the Romans may have inflicted a million casualties. Those insurgents who were captured alive were distributed as victims to the amphitheatres of the east (600 of the fittest were reserved for Rome) and the treasures of the Temple carried off as booty. (Some of them, including the great candelabrum, can still be seen portrayed on the triumphal arch of Titus in Rome.) Lingering resistance in the mountain fortress of Masada continued until 74 when, according to the historian Josephus, its last defenders committed mass suicide. Around the fortress the remains of a carefully built ramp and a ring of army camps still show the methodical and determined approach of the Romans to warfare and suppression of revolt. A second Jewish revolt in 132–5 was crushed with equal brutality. Confronted by some squabbling Greek cities in the early second century AD, the philosopher Plutarch reminded them of ‘the boots of the Roman soldiers poised over their heads’.

The suppression of the Jewish revolts showed that the earlier traditions of ruthlessness were not dead. Officially the day-to-day administration of the empire was less brutal. The process of punishment was regulated and restrained by law. In the provinces the governor alone had the right to pass a capital sentence, while citizens maintained the right to appeal to the emperor, in his role as tribune, in Rome. So Caiaphas, the High Priest, had to persuade Pontius Pilate to order the crucifixion of Jesus and Paul exercised his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to the emperor and so was shipped to Rome. However, all the evidence suggests that violence was routine in the conduct of the administration. Suetonius' and Tacitus' histories preserve the memory of the megalomaniac behaviour of Caligula and Nero against their subjects, and the lives of Tiberius and Domitian also ended in reigns of terror. Non-citizens had no protection against the arbitrary decisions of magistrates and there is evidence that governors would order executions to appease local pressure groups (the trial and crucifixion of Jesus on the authority of Pontius Pilate can be viewed in this context) or simply to clear overcrowded gaols. (David Mattingley, *Imperialism, Power and Identity: Experiencing the Roman Empire*, Princeton and London, 2010 is a study that suggests that Roman rule, especially in the west, has been too idealized.)

Capital punishment was used not only to eliminate undesirables but to act as an example to others. Crucifixions provided a slow death in public. The execution of criminals was institutionalized as public display on a far greater scale in the arena. Seneca visited the amphitheatre one day just as the latest crop of criminals was being dealt with:

All niceties were put aside, and it was pure and simple murder. The combatants have absolutely no protection. Their whole bodies are exposed to one another's blows and thus each never fails to injure his opponent. Most people in the audience prefer this type of match to the regular gladiators. The spectators demand that combatants who have killed their opponents be thrown to combatants who will in turn kill them, and they make a victor stay for another slaughter. For every combatant, therefore, the outcome is certain death. (Translation: Jo-Ann Shelton)

The use of terror as example was deeply embedded in the Roman mind. Like most societies of the ancient world Rome was very brutal, but the brutality was carried out with more efficiency than in most. In the original conquests of the empire one defiant city was often singled out for particularly harsh treatment in an attempt to cow the rest into quick submission. The same procedure was used to keep order at home. When a slave murdered his master, for instance, it was the custom to execute all the other slaves in the household. In AD 61 the wealthy City Prefect Lucius Pedanius Secundus was murdered by one of his slaves. He had 400 altogether and once news spread that all of them, including women and children, were to be put to death crowds gathered to protest. The matter was debated in the senate. The depth and rigidity of Roman conservatism can be seen in the speech of Gaius Cassius Longinus, quoted by Tacitus:

When wiser men have in past times considered and settled the whole matter, do you dare to contradict them?...Intimidation is the only way to keep down this scum. You argue that

innocent people will die. Yes, but when in a defeated army every tenth man is flogged to death, the brave have to draw lots with the others. Exemplary punishment always contains an element of injustice. But individual wrongs are outweighed by the advantage to the community.

His views prevailed. The unlucky 400 were led off to execution with the Praetorian Guard called out to line the route and hold off the protesting crowd. Records of the persecutions of Christians (covered in Chapter 31) suggest that torture and ill-treatment of suspects was routine. When Lucius, the hero of Apuleius' novel *The Golden Ass* (second century AD), is suspected of murder, instruments of torture, including hot coals and a rack, are produced in order to force him to reveal the names of his accomplices.

The Administration of the Provinces

In his *Res Gestae* Augustus boasted of 'the achievements by which he subjected the whole world to the *imperium* of the Roman people'. On the whole the emperors brought a more stable pattern of provincial administration after the corruption of many provincial administrators during the Republic (see earlier pp. 418–19). As Tacitus wrote in the *Annals*:

The new order [of Augustus] was popular in the provinces. There government by Senate and People [had been] looked upon sceptically as a matter of sparring dignitaries and extortionate officials. The legal system had provided no remedy against these, since it was wholly incapacitated by violence, favouritism, and, most of all, bribery.

The more conscientious emperors, such as Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius, and Vespasian in the first century, took special care that administration was fair and oppressive governors punished. On a day-to-day basis the good emperor was a manager, hearing petitions and acceding to them or turning them down, watching that rivalries between cities did not get out of hand, stopping building projects that were swallowing money, such as, at the behest of Trajan, a theatre at Nicaea that was steadily sinking into the ground. In practice during the stable years of the empire, dramatic initiatives were less important than ensuring the existing structure ran smoothly. (See, as an introduction, part III, 'Administration', in David Potter (ed.), *A Companion to the Roman Empire*, Oxford and New York, 2006.)

Intrinsic to stable imperial government was the development of the emperors' legal powers. These had been inherited from the magistrates of republican Rome. So, for instance, the emperor had the right to issue edicts proclaiming laws of a general character such as the granting of citizenship to the whole Roman world by Caracalla in 212 or Decius' requirement for all to sacrifice in 249. Decrees (*decreta*) were rulings by the emperors on specific legal issues and, although not binding on all cases, came to have the force of law. Later in the empire edicts and rulings were synthesized in law codes, notably those of Theodosius II (438) and Justinian (534).

Since the reign of Augustus a distinction had been made between those more vulnerable border provinces (twenty-two of them in 138) where the governor, usually

PROVINCES OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

AD 117



MAP 14

a senator, was appointed directly by the emperor as his legate, typically for a period of three years, and the remaining 'senatorial' provinces (ten of them in 138) where appointment was by lot from among senators of sufficient seniority. (They were granted proconsular powers.) Equestrians could serve as imperial legates, and in Egypt an equestrian (referred to as a prefect, a term officially used for one granted a military command) was always appointed, a reminder that this had been a personal conquest of Augustus. An equestrian received pay, at a generous rate for the senior posts, while a senator was supposed to do his job for the honour of it although he was given a substantial expense allowance. The title 'Procurator' was used by equestrian governors of minor provinces such as Judaea and of those who collected the taxes in the 'imperial' provinces (often referred to as 'fiscal procurators') or oversaw the emperor's estates, the *patrimonium* (see earlier, p. 475). As the imperial estates were extensive, a procurator could call on a governor for troops if there was any disorder.

A governor was provided with a remarkably small staff. The proconsul of Asia, for instance, had no more than two or three junior senators to help with day-to-day administration of justice. There would also be attendants, messengers, scribes, and a bodyguard who could also be used to track down offenders. In addition a governor would also select a group of friends, chosen perhaps as much to provide company as for any administrative skills they might have. This would be his entire retinue. Separate would be the quaestors responsible for financial matters with taxation sent up to central government. They were elected in Rome and then allocated to provinces by lot. This was the first step on the ladder of an administrative career. It is said that the relationship of governor to quaestor was like one of father to son but a 'good' emperor would watch such men and promote them if they were able (see the career of Pertinax, pp. 514, 559 below). The total number of senior officials was no more than 150 for the whole empire, perhaps one for every 400,000 of its subjects. (Estimates for the population of the empire at its height reach 60–5 million.)

The official business of the empire travelled along its roads and across its seas. The original purpose of the roads was military, to provide a fast means for the legions to reach areas where trouble brewed, but once established they provided a means of uniting the peoples of the empire. They were built in a standard method by which a paved surface rested on three layers of foundation, which included broken stone and rammed chalk. Good drainage was essential if a surface and foundation was not to break up and was provided through a cambered surface and good ditching. (The roads really did last. I was once on an archaeological survey in my native Suffolk where the line of a Roman road was plotted across a hillside. A trial dig at the top of the hill revealed the road was still there, surface and all, nearly 2,000 years after it was built.) Travel could be fast. A special messenger sent from Mainz, on the German border, to Rome in AD 69 made the 1,500-kilometre journey in about nine days. The emperor Claudius averaged nearly 90 kilometres a day as he crossed Gaul on his way to his 'conquest' of Britain in AD 43. As seen earlier (pp. 1–3) sea travel was not so predictable for those wanting to move fast as winds and weather fluctuated so widely.

There was always a critical time in a new province when order was imposed. Any combination of mismanagement and greed at this moment could be disastrous. The revolt of the Iceni in Britain in AD 60 is a good example. Their home, the east of England, was nominally under Roman control and their king, Prasutagus, had left his estates in his will to the Roman emperor (Nero), probably so that on his death his subjects and heirs would be treated fairly. Local Roman officials took a different view and interpreted the bequest as if it was the surrender of a defeated enemy. Plundering began and Prasutagus' widow, Boudicca, was flogged and his daughters raped. This was the signal for revolt. Other tribes that 'had not yet been broken by servitude' (Tacitus) joined in. The fury of the insurgents was directed first at Camulodunum, centre of the imperial cult (the modern Colchester), and then at Londinium (London), now probably the main administrative centre of the province, and Verulamium (the modern St Albans). Tacitus gives a total of 70,000 Romans and loyalists killed. 'The Britons took no prisoners, sold no captives as slaves, and went in for none of the usual trading of war. They wasted no time in getting down to the bloody business of hanging, burning and crucifying.' It was some time before the Roman governor, Suetonius Paulinus, could bring up his legions and use their discipline to crush the disorderly mass of British warriors. He then set about laying waste to their lands. On some sites, such as Colchester and South Cadbury in Somerset, archaeologists have been able to identify the layer of destruction. The 'desolation' the Romans made did in fact lead to peace. Archaeological evidence shows that when construction resumed on these sites, it was more likely to be of civilian than military buildings. (David Mattingley's *An Imperial Possession: Britain in the Roman Empire*, London, 2006, provides a fresh perspective on Britain in the empire. See also Charlotte Higgins, *Under Another Sky, Journeys in Roman Britain*, London, 2013.)

There had been no centralized taxation in Celtic Britain. In contrast, when the territories of the Carthaginian empire had been taken over their procedures for collecting tax had been retained and this was often the precedent followed when systems were already in place and had proved effective. In Egypt where a complex but long-established system of taxation had channelled resources from the Nile valley to pharaohs and now to Roman emperors, it was easy to exploit. Surviving papyri document the efficiency with which money was collected. In Ephesus, capital of the Roman province of Asia, an inscription from the time of Nero shows that the structure of taxation set up by the kings of Pergamum two centuries before was still in place. There was some scope for flexibility. When an earthquake struck the cities of Asia Minor the emperor Tiberius relieved them of taxation for five years. Again, the Frisians on the German border were cattle herders—it actually made more sense for them to pay their dues in hides rather than in coins as the leather could be transferred at once to the army.

Once order had been secured in a province a census was put in hand. The purpose of the census was to provide the basis on which taxes could be assessed. When Judaea became a Roman province in AD 6, for instance, the governor of the neighbouring province of Syria, Quirinius, moved in to make the assessment. (It must have been this census that Luke mistakenly links in his Gospel to the birth of Jesus.

Galilee was not a province of the empire at the time of Jesus' birth, it was subject to the taxation of Herod and later his son Herod Antipas, not the Roman authorities.) It would have been impossible to take the census without local help and so the local ruling classes were given much of the responsibility for compiling the details. If no other system existed, the two taxes were a poll tax, on individuals, including their workforce (from which Roman citizens were exempt), and a tax on property.

In the third century the jurist Ulpian recorded the procedure for the property tax. Each farm had to be named and described in relation to its neighbours and local town or village. The use of the land had to be entered, the amount of plough land, the number of vines and olive trees, and the extent of meadow and pasture. Houses and slaves were included. The amount of tax due was then computed and increasingly it was the city officials who were then responsible for its collection. Censuses were carried out every ten years in most provinces, every fourteen in Egypt, where some 300 declarations of property owned have survived. The *publicani*, the notorious tax farmers of the republic, disappear from the historical record, though their successors cannot have been much more welcome. Italy and Italian colonies remained exempt from these two taxes, a legacy of the days when republican plunder had balanced public expenditure. The exemption was finally ended by the emperor Diocletian.

There were other taxes. Augustus had instituted an inheritance tax, payable only by Roman citizens, specifically to fund discharge settlements for the army. There were indirect taxes on goods in transit, charged at a rate that was usually between 2 and 2.5 per cent and often collected by teams of imperial slaves, and a 1.5 per cent sales tax. They were very unpopular and Nero was tempted in a fit of generosity to abolish them altogether until he was persuaded that the state could not have borne the loss of revenue.

The taxation system had the advantage of being easy to administer and cheap to run. The revenue, normally in *denarii*, but also in kind, was transferred upwards to the imperial treasury and could then be distributed according to the needs of the empire. This enabled resources to be allocated from the richer provinces such as Asia and Africa to the poorer such as Britain, which required a permanent and expensive garrison. The overall burden was probably not oppressive. In the east the amount of grain raised seems to have been similar to that raised by the Seleucids. The weakness of the system was its inflexibility and perhaps the relatively low level at which taxation was set. As over 70 per cent of the empire's revenue was devoted to keeping the army intact, a sudden crisis, an attack on the borders, for instance, that required heavy extra expenditure on troops, strained the system. There was naturally resentment if any extra exactions were suddenly imposed. (Increased provincial taxation had been behind the revolt against Nero.) Until Diocletian reorganized the financial system in the early fourth century and instituted a more efficient system of taxing the empire's wealth emperors in difficulties were tempted to debase the coinage or encourage the legions to claw their food and supplies directly from the local population.

The scope of the governor's powers and any specific responsibilities attached to his post were normally set out before he left Rome. Within his province the governor

could make his own statement of his priorities. Central was his responsibility for maintaining order. Ulpian sums it up well:

A good and conscientious governor must see that the province he rules is peaceful and quiet, and he will achieve this without difficulty if he is scrupulous by ensuring that the province is actively searching out criminals. He should pick out those guilty of sacrilege, highwaymen, kidnappers and thieves and punish them according to their offences; he should also punish anyone who shelters them, as robbers cannot be hidden without such help.

In some cases the maintenance of order necessitated military campaigns but by the second century small-scale criminal cases predominated. Certain towns were designated as assize towns. The status was eagerly sought after as the influx of claimants, petitioners, and other hangers-on would be substantial and bring in a great deal of business. The town would be given a designated territory from which its cases would be drawn. In some areas the process was pragmatic. In eastern Syria the Romans found a network of small villages. They chose one, Appadana, and promoted it to an assize city that they then gave a Greek name, Neapolis, appropriately 'the new city'. They cemented the loyalty of its inhabitants by granting them a council whose members were awarded Roman citizenship. Neapolis's local magistrates, as with other cities, would be required to have the local criminals rounded up by the time the governor arrived. Justice was clearly rough. Although a governor could order a full investigation if he had doubts about any case, he often bowed to popular pressures and many criminals seem to have been condemned without much of a hearing. (Again the case of Jesus comes to mind as typical. He seems to have been flogged almost as a matter of course, and Pontius Pilate, the governor, put up little opposition to his crucifixion.)

Private citizens could also bring their civil cases, petitioning the governor to have them heard according to Roman law when there seemed an advantage for them in doing so. There is an Egyptian record of one prefect receiving no fewer than 1,804 petitions in three days. Gradually the use of Roman law became more popular, particularly when individuals from different cities or opposing legal systems were involved. It had well-set-out procedures and the use of precedent gave it some stability. Some city constitutions stipulated that any situation not covered by existing laws should be judged according to Roman civil law. In one long-running (from AD 213 to 237) case a dispute, between two villages in Phrygia over the extent of their obligations to provide transport for imperial officials, saw three procurators (the villages were within the boundaries of an imperial estate) struggling to unravel the issues. The representatives of the villages showed that they fully understood the imperial structure of justice, the laws established by precedent and their rights of appeal to higher officials, including, in the case of citizens, directly to the emperor. In this case the smaller village accused the larger village of bullying it and, when it won its case, it asked for a soldier to be appointed to protect it against its neighbour.

In addition to using Roman law as established by statute in Rome or by precedent the governor could create local laws himself. This was inevitable when he might be

faced with unique circumstances in an outlying province two months' travel from Rome. Communication did go on, however. In the famous correspondence between Pliny, governor of Bithynia, and the emperor Trajan, Pliny asks advice on a wide variety of issues: how to deal with Christians, how to punish slaves who tried to enlist in the army, whether he should put in hand the building of a canal between a lake and the sea, and at what age the emperor recommended entry to a local senate. Trajan's courteous replies insist that the administration should be in the interests of the people and that local tradition should be respected.

Altogether there were forty issues on which Pliny wrote for advice in two years. Many of them seem trivial but it can be assumed that on many more everyday matters he made up his mind himself. Gullible governors were often unwittingly involved in local power struggles and one suspects that Pliny was often caught by rival petitions from ambitious provincials that were difficult to resolve. Once a formal edict of the emperor or records of decisions made by the senate had been issued it could be recorded in inscriptions and again this represented a way in which the governor could escape direct criticism. These inscriptions not only acted as a permanent reminder of Rome's power but could be phrased to provide propaganda for the emperor concerned. The *Res Gestae*, probably set up in Ancyra at the behest of the provincial governor, is the classic example (see earlier, p. 463).

While the Romans had total confidence in their right to rule, it is hard to find any evidence of an imperial ideology. There was no vision towards which the governors or emperors guided their subject peoples. They relied instead on the natural integration of those who had an interest in the maintenance of a stable system with the Roman authorities. Over the centuries of the *pax Romana* it worked until outside pressures on the empire showed that such a vast area could not easily be defended against determined outsiders. Even then there proved to be a resilience on the structure of government that allowed it to be refocused for further survival. (See Chapters 30 and 32.)

The Frontiers

In his speech of praise to Rome (quoted below, p. 510) Aelius Aristides portrayed the inhabitants of the Roman empire as safe inside well-guarded and impenetrable frontiers. This was misleading. The concept of frontier took some time to mature. During the republic the vision of world conquest persisted and the idea that the empire should set limits to its expansion was never articulated. It was during the reign of Augustus that the concept first took root in face of the difficulties and disasters experienced in conquering the German tribes. Tiberius consolidated the policy and from then on the frontiers of the empire began to stabilize. Britain and Dacia were the only new areas conquered and held for any length of time after the reign of Augustus. Trajan may have dreamed of emulating Alexander in achieving new conquests to the east but his successor Hadrian recognized the impossibility of maintaining control of so vast an empire if its armies were also set on further

conquests. So he called a halt and began to consolidate the frontiers, most famously in the wall he built across northern Britain.

By the time the empire had reached its fullest extent, in the second century AD, there were in fact thousands of kilometres of boundaries to defend. From the mouth of the Rhine to that of the Danube is 2,000 kilometres. The borders of the north African provinces ran for a total of twice that. The eastern frontier still had a number of client kingdoms and no fortified frontier was necessary until these had been absorbed, as Cappadocia, Nabataea, Commagene were in the first century AD and Palmyra and Osrhoene in the second. (Armenia remained as a buffer state between Rome and Parthia.) The shortest marching route between the Black Sea and the Red Sea was then 3,000 kilometres by road.

Sometimes the frontiers were natural boundaries, such as rivers or mountains. Others ran over open desert or through woodland. It was obvious that these could not all be protected by military force, nor was there any particular wish to close the empire off from the world beyond. Rome needed its luxuries, amber and fur from the Baltic, silks from China, spices from elsewhere in the east, and gold from deep within Africa. Barry Cunliffe argues that Rome's greatest need was for slaves—an estimated 140,000 were required annually to maintain the supply of the empire—and so contacts had to be sustained outside the empire. In effect, except in a few defined trouble spots, the frontiers of the empire were permeable. Even Hadrian's Wall, the most sophisticated and complete barrier between the empire and the outside world, was designed to be crossed by traders entering or leaving under Roman supervision and its main purpose may have been to control this communication more effectively. (See the lively account in Alistair Moffat, *The Wall: Rome's Greatest Frontier*, Edinburgh, 2008. The English Heritage Guide, *Hadrian's Wall*, with reconstructions, maps, etc., is by David Breeze, London, 2006.)

This does not mean there were not fortifications along the borders of the empire. Hadrian's Wall in Britain is, as just noted, the best-known example, but in Germany there was the *limes*, originally a military road overseen by watchtowers. Under Hadrian continuous palisades were constructed to strengthen it. In Africa ditches and watchtowers were built to protect the prosperous grain- and olive-growing areas from raids by nomadic tribes. (These tribes were never a serious security threat and no more than 45,000 troops (legionaries and auxiliaries) were allocated for the entire 4,000-kilometre frontier.) In the east there were no formal lines of defence but roads were built running back from the frontier with Parthia so that troops could be rushed to the front if needed.

In reality the defence of the empire depended not on walls but on a mixture of diplomacy and the ultimate threat of armed force. The native tribes could be bought off by gifts of money or luxury goods, or offered special protection. The sons of leaders could be brought into the empire, 'civilized' in the emperor's household, and then returned home, hopefully as lifelong friends of the Roman people. Disputes between tribes could be fostered so that they did not unite against the empire. Tacitus, as usual, put it shrewdly: 'May the tribes ever retain, if not love for us, at least hatred for each other.' There were always dangers along the northern border simply

due to the shifting allegiances and relationships of the various tribes, and when pressures built up among them from the end of the second century diplomacy was not to be enough. It was easier, in theory, to deal with Parthia, a centralized state with only one ruler with whom to negotiate. (See Philip Parker, *The Empire Stops Here: A Journey along the Frontiers of the Roman World*, London, 2009, for a personal but erudite exploration of the Roman frontiers.)

The Army

As the frontiers of the empire stabilized, the role of the army changed. Gone were the days of continuous conquest and now the army could expect to be largely immobile for years at a time. Augustus had settled the number of legionaries at about 150,000, and a total of twenty-eight to thirty legions was maintained in the first two centuries AD. They were stationed along the more vulnerable frontiers of the empire. The Rhine had been allocated eight legions in 23 BC but as things became calmer four were seen to be enough. Further east along the Danube was the most vulnerable area, and in AD 150 ten legions, a third of the entire army, were stationed there. Eight legions were allocated to the eastern border, three to Britain, and two to the whole of north Africa. Thus over half of the legions were strung along the Danube–Euphrates axis. This was why Rome became increasingly marginalized as a command centre and why, in the fourth century, Constantine was to choose what had hitherto been the Greek city of Byzantium, at the fulcrum of this axis, as his new capital, Constantinople. In the west, cities north of Rome such as Mediolanum, the modern Milan, and Trier, now became used as imperial capitals. (For the army in general, see Simon James, *Rome and the Sword: How Warriors and Weapons Shaped Roman History*, London and New York, 2011, and Nigel Pollard and Joanne Berry, *The Complete Roman Legions*, London and New York, 2012.)

The army was the focus of an enormous official bureaucracy that kept records of every detail of its day-to-day life, its effective strength, and its operations. It offered a well-defined career for those who joined it, and as citizenship, the main criterion for entry to the army, spread, it drew on a larger and larger pool of the subject peoples of the empire. Greeks had never been enthusiastic recruits and by the end of the second century Italians were a rarity. The recruiting grounds were now Gaul, Spain, Syria, and, especially important in providing tough leaders in the later empire, the Balkans. Legions could now raise men locally instead of having to wait for recruits from Italy. There was adequate pay and a set period of service, though there were complaints on occasions that soldiers were not released when their period of service was over. Emperors would supplement the pay with bonuses on special occasions. The main drawback to army life was that a legionary could not contract a legal marriage, though, in practice, stable relationships appear to have been common and the male children of these accepted as recruitable citizens. In the reign of Septimius Severus (193–211) marriages were finally allowed.

Each legion had a nominal strength of some 5,000 infantrymen and 120 cavalry. (The evidence from the Vindolanda tablets (see below, p. 513) suggests that the fighting strength of a unit was significantly lower as a result of secondment, illness, desertion, or leave.) The infantrymen were well protected and heavily armed. Their helmets were made of bronze with an iron skull-plate inside and the upper parts of their bodies were covered in a cuirass. They carried two javelins with which to make first contact with an enemy and a sword for hand-to-hand fighting. Discipline was rigid and training, in theory, constant. A handbook on military training by Flavius Vegetius Renatus, written in the fourth and fifth centuries AD but referring back to earlier times, sums up the legions' strengths.

The Roman people owed the conquest of the world to no other cause than military training, discipline in their camps, and practice in warfare. What chance would the small number of Romans have had against the multitude of Gauls? How could they have ventured, with their small stature, against the tall Germans? It is clear that the Spaniards excelled our men not only in numbers but in physical strength... and no one doubts that we were surpassed by the Greeks in skills and intelligence. But against all these we prevailed by skilful selection of recruits, by teaching, as I have said, the principles of war, by hardening them in daily exercise, by acquainting them beforehand through field manoeuvres with everything that can happen in the line of march and in battles, and by severe punishment for indolence. For knowledge of military science nourishes boldness in combat. No one fears to do what he is confident he has done well... (Translation: N. Lewis and M. Reinhold)

The legions were normally stationed at or close to the frontier, in those provinces allocated to the emperor in Augustus' settlement of 27 BC. The emperor was thus, in effect, their supreme commander and at times of crisis was expected to lead them in battle. In some cases, such as Claudius' conquest of Britain, this leadership was token. In others—the Flavian emperors, for instance—the emperors were military men and probably more at home in the army than elsewhere. Marcus Aurelius is the classic example of an emperor with no military experience or pretensions taking his duties as supreme commander with great seriousness. As noted above, the legions always showed special respect for an emperor who shared their life with them while on campaign and throughout the empire military success was fundamental to the emperor's status.

Each legion was commanded by a senator who had reached the status of a praetor. Like the emperor he might have had little military experience as the career path of an able senator would include both civil and military commands. By the third century, as pressures built up on the empire, command was increasingly given to those, many of them equestrians, who had had longer experience in the field. Under the commander were six tribunes, younger men, most of them, again, equestrians, some of whom would be seeking a senatorial career. The career officers were the centurions who had made their way up from the ranks. These were graded by seniority and the most senior, the *primus pilus*, was a man of great authority and experience who was paid a substantial salary and enough on discharge to make him eligible for equestrian status. In a society where inherited status remained important, the army was a major instrument of social mobility, a means by which a

man could achieve respected status purely through merit. A fine example, from the first half of the second century AD, is Quintus Lollius Urbicus, the son of a Berber landowner from the small town of Tiddis in the province of Africa. His career as an army officer took him to the ends of the empire. He served first in Asia, then in Judaea, where he was involved in the suppression of the Jewish revolt of 132–5. He then served along the Rhine and Danube borders before being made governor in Britain, from where he campaigned into Scotland. Finally he was made prefect of the city of Rome, an extraordinary career for one whose origins were so modest.

With the changed conditions of the first and second centuries the legions became settled in bases, normally stone fortresses laid out on a standardized pattern. The most sedentary legion seems to have been Legion III Augusta that supervised the African frontier between 31 BC and AD 238. (Its base for 200 years at Lambaesis, in modern Algeria, is the best-preserved legionary fort anywhere in the world.) Civilian settlements often grew up around these settled legions. The trappings of Roman culture, baths and amphitheatres, would appear and the whole complex would have a major impact on the local economy. With time the legion would become integrated with the local community, even recruiting its men locally. The local administration could call on the legionaries' skills as engineers, surveyors, and builders. At Dura-Europus on the eastern frontier soldiers were to be found building the city baths and its amphitheatre.

The danger was lax discipline. A report to the emperor Lucius Verus in AD 165 complained of a Syrian legion whose soldiers were wandering around the region, often drunk and not used even to carrying arms. Earlier Hadrian had spotted the problem that he knew would arise after he had called a halt to expansion. He is recorded travelling through one province after another inspecting all the garrisons and forts. According to the historian Dio Cassius:

He personally viewed and investigated absolutely everything, not merely the usual installations of the camps, such as weapons, engines, trenches, ramparts and palisades, but also the private affairs of everyone, both of the men serving in the ranks and of the officers themselves—their lives, their quarters and their habits—and he reformed and corrected in many cases practices and arrangements for living that had become too luxurious. (Translation: N. Lewis and M. Reinhold)

Such continual supervision was essential for keeping the empire's defences in good order. Yet inactivity also bred conservatism. The legions were formidable when they confronted an enemy head-on but they assumed that the enemy would play into their hands by doing so. By the third century, armies, such as those of the Parthians, with flexible cavalry forces could outmanoeuvre a slow-moving legion. Again the legions were not fitted for siege warfare. The three years that the troops of Septimius Severus took to subdue the isolated city of Byzantium in the 190s makes the point.

From Augustus' reign there was increasing reliance on auxiliary troops. The auxiliaries were recruited from non-citizens and grouped in units of 500 or 1,000 men. The emphasis was on skills, in archery or horsemanship, for instance, which were lacking in the heavy infantry of the legions. Gaul, Spain, and Thrace were important

recruiting grounds. At first auxiliary units would serve under their own native commanders but gradually they were integrated into the structure of the Roman army, with equestrian commanders, fixed rates of pay, and the promise of citizenship at the end of service. They served in a variety of roles and, in fact, the diversity of their skills meant that they could be used more flexibly than the legions. On the march they protected the cumbersome legions from attack by probing the countryside ahead of their line of march and guarding their flanks. By the end of the first century AD they were quite capable of fighting battles on their own. The Battle of Mons Graupius, the greatest victory of Agricola's incursions into Scotland (AD 83), was entirely an auxiliary affair (and it had the advantage of not adding to the legionaries' casualty list). In peacetime auxiliary units were normally given guard duties along the frontiers. Hadrian's Wall was manned by auxiliary units, for instance. On discharge auxiliaries received a bronze certificate to mark their service and the number found by archaeologists suggest that they were treasured possessions.

The Integration of Local Elites

During these centuries of relative stability, a process normally referred to as 'Romanization' took place. The word, in its loosest sense, describes the interaction of Roman and local cultures with the implication that a 'Roman' culture came to predominate. Insofar as the Roman city and, in the countryside, the Roman villa (see below, p. 523) became the focus of life for local elites in many parts of the empire this is certainly true but it would be wrong to assume that local cultures provided nothing of their own. In cases such as Greece and Egypt, there were civilizations much older than that of Rome and these retained a sense of cultural superiority. In the east, in the so-called Second Sophistic, Greek culture was revived in the second century, primarily, it seems, as a *response* to Romanization (see Chapter 29). One must also avoid the assumption that what was 'Roman' was unchanging. After all Roman culture was already deeply imbued with Greek elements and the interaction between the two cultures continued to be important throughout the history of the empire. So the interplay between Rome and other cultures was bound to be fluid and to have varied from one part of the empire to another. Archaeology is also showing how Romanization spread outside the empire's boundaries, making the later relationship between Roman and barbarian far less confrontational culturally than it might have been. (Janet Huskinson (ed.), *Experiencing Rome: Culture, Identity and Power in the Roman Empire*, London and New York, 1999, is valuable on the cultural interactions that arose from stable administration. Greg Woolf, *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul*, Cambridge and New York, 1998, is excellent. See also Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Rome's Cultural Revolution*, Cambridge and New York, 2008, for a penetrating analysis.)

The Roman empire prospered because it won the allegiance of the provincial elites who came to understand that their own status not only depended on the security provided by the Romans but could be enhanced by it. It gained vitality partly

because pragmatic emperors knew they had to give these elites freedom to flourish. The shock of recognition that a local elite had much to gain from Roman rule was expressed at its most eloquent in Greece in the second and third centuries AD. A panegyric speech to Rome by the Greek orator Aelius Aristides survives from about AD 150 in which he dwells on the advantages to the Greek cities of their subject status:

Your subjects relax in utmost delight, content to be released from troubles and miseries, and aware that they were formerly engaged in aimless shadow boxing. Others do not know or remember what territory they once ruled... Were there ever so many cities, inland and maritime?... Were they ever so thoroughly modernized.... Not only were former empires so inferior at the top, but also the peoples whom they ruled were none of them on a par, in numbers or in calibre, with those same peoples under you.... Now under you all the Greek cities emerge... All the monuments, works of art and adornments in them mean glory for you... all other competition between them has ceased, but a single rivalry obsesses every one, to appear as beautiful and attractive as possible. (Translation: N. Lewis and M. Reinhold)

Underlying this famous piece of rhetoric (Aelius Aristides was one of the leaders of a revival in Greek oratory, described in Chapter 29) is an emphasis on status within the empire. 'You have divided all the people of the empire in two classes,' he goes on; 'the more cultured, better born and more influential everywhere you have declared Roman citizens: the rest vassals and subjects.' This was the crucial point. Rome had allied herself so successfully with provincial ruling classes that they collaborated in keeping order and maintaining a common front against threats from below. Even in the revolt of 66 the more conservative of the Jewish authorities sided with the Romans.

One of the developments of the second century was a more formal distinction, enshrined in law, between those citizens who were *honestiores*, of higher status, and the *humiliores*, the rest. The *honestiores*, who included senators, equestrians, and local magistrates as well as army veterans, were likely to have their cases heard first and avoid imprisonment while awaiting trial while witnesses of poorer status were routinely tortured. A convicted *honestior* was usually exiled, his poorer fellow subjects executed by crucifixion or murdered in the arena. (For the distinction between slave and free, which provided the most rigid and important mark of status for the mass of the population, see below, p. 517.)

Cities of the Empire

If one is looking for the focus for the sense of shared values, it must be, as Aelius Aristides stressed, the city. The Romans did not, of course, create the idea in the Mediterranean, and in their conquest of Carthage, Greece, Egypt, and the Near East they brought under their control a vast array of cities, many of them with impressive histories of their own. However, there were Roman cities that were deliberately planted as part of the system of imperial control. First there were the *coloniae*, garrison towns of legionaries or veterans, established primarily for stra-

tegic reasons, especially during the conquest of Italy and a wider empire. They provided land for veterans who would have every incentive to fight to defend it. Many *coloniae* were placed on virgin sites (in the museum at Aquileia there is a plaque commemorating the first ploughing up of the boundaries of the *colonia* in 181 BC) but they could also be founded on existing urban sites. Colonia Augusta Nemausus, the modern Nîmes in southern France, was founded on the urban centre, *oppidum*, of the Arecomici tribe, for instance. By the time of the empire, the word had acquired connotations of elevated status so that an emperor could bestow the status of a *colonia* on a city as a mark of honour. Vespasian, for instance, granted the accolade of *colonia* to the city of Caesarea, the administrative capital of Judaea, originally built by Herod even before Judaea had become part of the empire.

In addition to the *coloniae*, there were the *municipia*. The name was originally used of a self-governing community that had become an ally of Rome but again the term developed into a mark of status that could be conferred by the emperor. Below the *municipia* were the *civitates*. The term *civitas*, ‘community’, was used to designate an independent community, of non-citizen status, often based on a local ethnic group but not necessarily on a town, although it was rare in the middle or later empire to find a *civitas* without its urban centre. There were also the *vici*, often translated as ‘villages’ though the larger were the size of towns and the term could be used to denote a district of a particular city—Rome had its *vici*. The *vici* had no formal status within the empire and remained subordinate to the local administrative centre. They could, however, be raised to the status of a *municipium* with a constitution provided by Rome, often at the request of local aristocrats who wanted their loyalty to be formally recognized.

An example of such a promotion survives from the town of Irni in Spain. The town is made a *municipium* by Augustus with ‘Latin rights’ (see pp. 369, 376) and a Roman-style constitution in which detailed regulations are laid down for the election of magistrates, the conduct of a senate, and the procedures for raising taxation, using local labour, and administering justice. On the completion of their term of office magistrates would become Roman citizens, and with time a *municipium*, whatever its native origins, would become an integrated part of the empire.

Tacitus mocked the process of urbanization as he saw it happening in Britain during the time his father-in-law Agricola was governor:

Agricola had to deal with people living in isolation and ignorance, and therefore prone to fight; and his object was to accustom them to a life of peace and quiet by the provision of amenities. He therefore gave private encouragement and official assistance to the building of temples, public squares and good houses, he praised the energetic and scolded the slack; and competition for honour proved as effective as compulsion. Furthermore he educated the sons of the chiefs in the liberal arts... The result was that instead of loathing the Latin language they became eager to speak it effectively. In the same way, our national dress came into favour and the toga was everywhere to be seen. And so the population was led into the demoralising temptations of arcades, baths and sumptuous banquets. The unsuspecting Britons talked of such novelties as ‘civilization’, when in fact they were only a feature of their enslavement. (From *Agricola*. Translation: S. A. Handford)

Such may have been the view of a sophisticated and cynical Roman but the process succeeded in building loyal provincial elites. The steps by which a particular family could become integrated into the administration of the empire can be seen through the descendants of a Gallic aristocrat, Epotsorovidius. After the conquest of Gaul by Caesar, Epotsorovidius' son emerges as a Roman citizen and combines Caesar's name (an indication that citizenship was a result of Caesar's patronage) with a Gallic one to become Caius Julius Agedomopas. Two generations later the family has become completely Romanized, suggesting that Latin may have become their preferred language. Gaius Julius Rufus, of the fourth generation, was a priest of the cult of Rome and Augustus at Lugdunum (Lyon) and a *praefectus fabrorum*, an army official concerned with building works. His wealth was such that he was able to donate two quintessential Roman buildings, an amphitheatre, to Lyon, and a triumphal arch, to his native town Mediolanum Santonum (modern Saintes).

Alongside the integration of the local elite into city government went the spread of Roman citizenship. Citizens acquired status and privileges including the right to take part in the administration of many cities, join the legions, or enjoy the benefits of Roman law. The physical mark of citizen status was the right to wear a toga. Until 212, when Caracalla declared that all subjects of the empire (except slaves and some categories of freedmen) were citizens, the process developed naturally as an individual, by virtue of a magistracy in a city or service in an auxiliary army unit, for instance, acquired citizenship and then passed it on to his descendants. A freed slave would also eventually acquire citizen rights if his master was a citizen himself. Whole communities could also be granted citizen rights. (More common, however, was the grant of 'Latin rights' to a community. This allowed it rights of trade and intermarriage with similar communities. Vespasian gave Latin rights to some 400 urban communities in Spain.)

The spread of citizenship did lead, in the eyes of the emperors at least, to a requirement of shared obligation in return. This was particularly important when the empire came under stress and one can see the insistence by emperors such as Decius in demanding sacrifice by all (which placed communities such as the Christians who refused to sacrifice to pagan gods under immense pressure) as an attempt to reinforce a common loyalty to the empire through respect for its traditional gods (see below, p. 564).

Decius could make his demand because the traditional gods of Rome had travelled with the spread of Roman rule. The constitution of the *colonia* of Urso in Spain (second half of the first century AD) shows that gods, rituals, and priesthoods were modelled on those from Rome, and, as has been seen, the imperial cult was also ubiquitous. In fact, it was increasingly a requirement that it should be a central part of any city's religious life. In army circles, as a third-century calendar from Dura-Europus suggests, the imperial cult dominated public ritual. Yet once the formal recognition of Rome's gods had been accepted, usually by a temple in the forum, there was tolerance of others. 'Each province and city has its own god: Astarte in Syria, Dusares in Arabia, Belenus in Noricum, Caelestis in Africa', noted the Christian church father Tertullian. The standing of these local gods depended

on their prestige and the culture within which they were set. Even the most sophisticated Romans were attracted by ancient Greek cults, and at Eleusis one finds emperors and senators applying for admission to the mysteries. In the army soldiers maintained their private beliefs in favoured gods alongside their public veneration of the imperial cult.

Integration was further consolidated in that Roman or Greek gods could absorb the attributes of local gods. In *On the Syrian Goddess*, an account of a pilgrimage to Hieropolis by the second-century Lucian (see further below, p. 544), the pilgrim comes across a statue of Hera in the temple. 'As you look at Hera, she reveals a multiform shape. On the whole she is Hera by accurate reckoning; but she has something of an Athena, and Aphrodite and Selene and Rhea and Artemis and Nemesis and the Fates.' The Platonist Celsus wrote in the second century that 'it makes no difference whether we call Zeus the Most High or Zeus or Adonis or Saboath or Amun like the Egyptians, or Papaeus like the Scythians.' One temple to Zeus in Libya honoured him in the unexpected role of protector of caravan routes across the desert. In Gaul dozens of examples of Mars with a suffix of a local god are to be found and the attributes of the original god of war might actually expand with the absorbed powers of the local gods. Despite the plethora of local gods, the elevation of one of them above the others, 'henotheism' as it is known, was common and there were references to one *Theos Hypsistos*, 'the Highest God'. (See P. Athanassiadi and M. Frede (eds.), *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, especially chapter 4 by Stephen Mitchell, Oxford, 1999.)

'Instead of loathing the Latin language they became eager to speak it effectively.' As Tacitus noted, Romanization involved, for many, some mastery of Latin. As mentioned earlier, one of the most unexpected finds in recent British archaeology has been the series of documents written in ink on thin wooden tablets preserved in waterlogged deposits at Vindolanda, a fort manned by auxiliaries of the late first century AD near to the future site of Hadrian's Wall. The letters contain official requests for more money to buy supplies, reports of military strength, personal correspondence between soldiers and their relations, and even women writing to each other to arrange a birthday party. The auxiliaries were not British but mainly from northern Gaul and the number of individual hands suggests that literacy was quite widespread. What is particularly interesting is that these native Gauls wrote in colloquial Latin, with much use of army slang. While some of their language remains untranslatable there are marked similarities with the colloquial Latin of graffiti from Pompeii from just a few years earlier and a similarity in the use of Latin (which is written in the 'Old Roman' cursive script of Vindolanda) has also been seen in texts on third-century AD papyri from Egypt. Here were subjects of the same empire, but of very different backgrounds, using their second language, Latin, in a recognizably uniform way. Much the same was happening in the Greek east as will be explored in Chapter 29.

Wealth and Identity

The Roman world was one in which formal definitions of status remained important. The distinction between slave and free was a fundamental one, but there was, as mentioned in Chapter 27, among free men the further distinction between the *honestiores* and *humiliores*. Senators and the equestrian class were *honestiores* by virtue of their status and so was the growing class of *decuriones*. Originally this was a status awarded to the councillors of *coloniae* and *municipia*, nominally a hundred of them in a typical city. As with the senators and equestrians there was a wealth requirement and a man needed to be of high local reputation. With time the *decuriones* became a hereditary class but the demands associated with the status also became a burden as the weight of taxation (which the *decuriones* played an important part in collecting) and the maintenance of their cities became more onerous.

Equestrian and even senatorial rank could be achieved through sheer talent. This became particularly important in the late second century when the military pressures built up (see Chapter 30). While in the settled reigns of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius most governors came from traditional stock, Marcus Aurelius drew on men whose background is often obscure but who could be trusted to calm unsettled provinces or deal with a sudden raid on the empire. So Pertinax, the son of a freedman, began his career as a centurion. His qualities were spotted and he was offered patronage and more senior posts of command until he came to the notice of the emperor. Promoted, he then served in campaigns against the Parthians, moved to Britain, then to the Balkans, and then to Italy where he was a prefect of Rome. These were equestrian posts but Pertinax was finally admitted to the senate, awarded a consulship, and returned to the Balkans for further commands. Not surprisingly there are reports of outrage by traditionalists over his spectacular rise. In fact, his greatest challenge was yet to come (see below, p. 559).

Even if there was a wealth requirement for all these classes, that wealth had to be displayed within conventional ways. High living could be openly despised, as it was by the immensely rich Stoic philosopher Seneca, and vulgar display of wealth would be ridiculed. The classic example in literature is the ostentatious and boorish Trimalchio in Petronius' *Satyricon* (see above, p. 472). An acceptable approach to

lavish spending lay in patronage of one's local city. The opulent library given to the city of Ephesus by the family of one Celsus, who became consul in AD 120, is a fine example. Its façade still stands even if its 12,000 volumes or rolls have long since gone. An alternative was to stage games for the city. On a day-to-day level a great man would have an open house in the sense of making his wealth available for others to enjoy rather than shutting it away behind closed doors. Again in Ephesus, in the recently excavated 'terraced houses', one aristocratic house has several dining rooms, graded according to the status of the visiting diner. The size of a man's entourage was an important mark of his public status. Formal status was reinforced in the public arena by customs such as reserving sections of the theatre for each class.

The patron–client relationship was central to Roman society. It reflected a harsh world in which advancement was difficult without the help of a man of higher status. In the verses of Martial and Juvenal (see below) the client is presented as in a permanent state of humiliation. He abases himself before his patron in order to get fed. However, some accounts give a more sympathetic view of the personal element involved. So the senator Pliny the Younger reports of one Julius Naso, a client whom he was supporting for office:

He has made friends and cultivated friendship, and in my own case, he singled me out for his friend and model, as soon as he could trust his own judgment. He is at my side full of concern when I plead in court or give a reading; he is there to take an interest the moment my trifling works see the light.

A patron would gain prestige from his ability to place his clients and Pliny the Younger goes on to describe his own feeling as he waits for the vote of the senate on a post for Julius. 'I hang in suspense: I am worried by hope and excited by fear; I do not feel like an ex-consul. For I once more seem to be a candidate myself for all the offices for which I ran. In short, if Naso wins the position he seeks, the honour is his; if he is denied, the rejection is mine.' The relationship was found at every level of Roman society, the emperor had his clients as did rich senators and provincial grandees. It was so deeply engrained that with the coming of Christianity bishops become patrons (petitioning the emperor for exemptions from tax for their clergy) and even clients in the sense of adopting 'patron saints' to represent them at the 'court' of the Last Judgement.

However much the patron–client relationship may have helped make everyday life more bearable for some, for the mass of population of the empire this remained a cruel and unforgiving world. For Rome itself the reality of daily life in a city where the gap between rich and poor was immense is vividly documented in the work of two poets of the late first century, Martial, a native of Spain who arrived in the city about AD 64, and Juvenal, from Latium itself. (Martial is best remembered for his numerous surviving *Epigrams*, Juvenal for his *Satires*.) Both describe the streets blocked with people, the decaying tenements, with the roof tiles falling from them on to passers-by, the appalling noise of the city. Before dawn it is the bakers who disturb you, says Martial, then the schoolteachers, while

all day there is the hammering of coppersmiths, the clinking of the coins of the money changers, the chanting of priests, and the patter of beggars. The rich can move around freely, says Juvenal. They have tall litter-bearers who lift them above the crowds. The poor have to struggle through the mud, being jostled, stepped upon, and subjected to violence. Their homes are no more than flimsy boards, vulnerable to fire and collapse. It is only the rich who can buy peace, the space of a garden, and the security and status provided by a mass of attendants.

Literary sources also provide some details of everyday life in the eastern half of the empire. The Gospels, for instance, provide a vivid picture of life in first-century Palestine (see Chapter 31). For the mid-second century there is Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, the only full-length novel in Latin to have survived. Not much is known of Apuleius. He was a native of the city of Madaura in Africa and appears to have travelled widely in the African provinces lecturing in philosophy. *The Golden Ass* draws on earlier Greek tales of one Lucius who, while travelling in Thessaly, becomes transformed into an ass. He can only be restored to human form by chewing roses and much of the tale describes his adventures in search of them. He is eventually drawn into a festival to the goddess Isis where he finds the roses he needs. Human again, he becomes an initiate into the mysteries of the goddess (see p. 342). It is an extraordinary novel, especially in its extravagant use of language (which has now been translated to acclaim by the classicist Sarah Ruden).

Both the Gospels and *The Golden Ass* record the life of the small dusty towns of the east and the countryside surrounding them. It is not a wealthy world and there is little in the way of luxury. Some comfort is provided for the more prosperous inhabitants by the local baths and by the ministrations of servants and slaves. There are social gatherings, weddings, evening dinner parties, and festivals. In the small town of Hypata, the setting for the first part of *The Golden Ass*, the inhabitants join in the local Festival of Laughter with enthusiasm, crowding into the theatre for a mock trial of Lucius (still at this point in human form).

Alongside such diversions, however, there are continual reminders of the insecurities of life, the prevalence of poverty and disease. As the extraordinary range of medical concoctions outlined in, for example, the *Natural History* of the Elder Pliny (AD 23–79) shows ('For fractures of the ribs, goat's dung applied in old wine is especially extolled...recurrent fevers are cured by wearing the right eye of a wolf, salted and attached'), there was no understanding of disease and most afflictions must have remained without effective treatment. This explains why there was such heavy reliance on magic makers and miracle workers. The everyday use of magic pervades *The Golden Ass* (its setting, Thessaly, was seen as the home of magic and enchantment), and the Gospel accounts show how quickly stories of successful healing spread through the local community. There is a persistence of everyday violence. In *The Golden Ass* adolescents from the local 'first families' are apt to rampage through Hypata in the early hours, picking out foreigners to terrorize. Those with luxury goods keep them secure in a strong room at the centre of their houses with the outside doors barred and guarded by porters. Outside the towns bandits haunt the roads. The authorities bring out the instruments of torture as soon as they have a suspect to question.

Despite the insecurities of everyday life there remains, however, the appearance of an overriding order. There are magistrates and local Roman garrisons. There is some attempt to provide justice, even though little sympathy is given to supposed troublemakers and punishments are cruel. It is possible to travel from one part of Galilee or Thessaly to another while the apostle Paul's journeys through the eastern empire were extensive. There are inns to welcome the traveller or the possibility of an introduction to a local notable who will provide hospitality. There is the sense of a shared cultural background. In short, society in the empire did have some form of cohesion, even if only of a limited kind. (For a lively account of a journey across Italy see Horace's *Satires* 1.5.)

Very little is known about the way of life of the free poor or the margins on which they survived. Most lived on the land, as landless labourers, tenants, or peasant owners, and were subject to all the fluctuations of the seasons and climate. Famine must have been common, and was probably accentuated by the power of the cities to draw in what surpluses of crops remained. For those who were labourers four *sestertii* seems to have been the maximum possible wage, three or even two *sestertii* more likely. A miner from Dacia is recorded in an inscription as earning one and a half *sestertii* a day plus keep. Some prices recorded in Pompeii suggest that a *sestertius* might buy 2 kilograms of wheat, while one *as*, a quarter of a *sestertius*, would buy a plate, a lamp, or a measure of wine. In one Spanish example an *as* would buy admission to the baths. This suggests a modest but sufficient way of life for a labourer in full-time employment, but much of the work must have been seasonal and unpredictable, the labourers waiting in the market-place, as in the Gospel parables, in the hope of finding a master to employ them. It is also clear that the prices of necessities fluctuated wildly and, at times of shortage, wheat could soar to six or seven times its normal price.

Slavery in the Roman World

The principal distinction in the law of persons is this, that all men are either free or slaves, next free men are either freeborn or freedmen, free born as those born free, freedmen those manumitted from lawful slavery. (Gaius, *Institutes*)

The labourers just described were free men but it is difficult to gauge what the concept of freedom meant in a world that was poor and, despite some overall improvement in order, insecure. Slavery was an integral part of this world. In Italy slaves had been accumulated as the plunder of war. In his *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Cambridge, 1994) Keith Bradley points out that in the early days of Rome slaves were defeated enemies whom the victor had the right to kill but chose to preserve, under a suspended death sentence as it were. The defeated were also, in Roman ideology, seen as abject in themselves. From there it was possible to argue that slaves were slaves because they were, or had become through misfortune, servile in nature. (It needs to be remembered that, in reality, slaves, particularly those

from the Greek world, must often have been more culturally sophisticated than their Roman masters.)

For historical reasons slavery remained most prevalent in Italy. The sources probably exaggerate when they talk of thousands enslaved after each Roman victory (no less than 150,000 after the taking of Epirus in 167 BC) but successful imperialism certainly transformed the nature of Italian society. An estimate is that there were 2–3 million slaves there, possibly up to 35 per cent of the population, at the end of the first century BC. The concentration was, according to some studies of fragmentary and inadequate evidence, perhaps twice as great in the major cities as it was in the countryside. In the Greek east, slavery had, of course, been part of the culture for centuries (see earlier, pp. 26, 227) but the impact of Rome must have disrupted traditional supply routes with a greater number of Greeks being enslaved by Romans than ever before in the years of conquest. Evidence from Roman Egypt suggests that slaves eventually made up 11 per cent of the population there. In much of the west slavery remained less common. There are relatively few references to slaves in Britain, for instance, and in Gaul, which had provided slaves for Rome before its conquest by Caesar, slaves are to be found only in cities.

There is virtually no evidence of any challenge to the institution of slavery in the Greek or Roman world during this period. Some Stoics did advocate that the slave be recognized as a human being. ‘Remember, if you please, that the man you call slave springs from the same seed, enjoys the same daylight, breathes like you, lives like you, dies like you... You can as easily conceive him a free man as he can conceive you a slave,’ writes Seneca in one of his letters. This was, however, no more than prudent and paternalistic humanitarianism and shows no concern with the institution itself.

The teachings of the New Testament made little difference. The parable of ‘the lazy slave’ (Matthew 25: 14–30) is especially interesting in giving an insight into how Jesus saw slavery in his day. The ‘man who is going abroad’ entrusts his gold to his slaves (New Testament *doulous*, the Greek word for ‘slaves’, though, interestingly, often wrongly translated as ‘servants’ so eliminating the crucial distinction between free servants and slaves) but when one fails to increase his bag of gold Jesus approves of the way he is ‘thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’. Is Jesus referring to normal practice in a slave household? At John 8: 34 Jesus associates slavery with sinfulness. The author of Ephesians (composed in the second half of the first century AD) simply transfers the institution into a new context. ‘Slaves, be obedient to the men who are called your masters in this world, with deep respect and sincere loyalty, as you are obedient to Christ, not only when you are under their eye, as if you only had to please men, but because you are slaves of Christ and wholeheartedly do the will of God.’ Freedom comes for the Christian in the next world, not this one. (See the excellent discussion in Jennifer Glancy, ‘Slavery and the Rise of Christianity’, chapter 21 in Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge (eds.), *The Cambridge History of World Slavery*, i: *Slavery in the Ancient Mediterranean*, Cambridge, 2011.)

There was little economic rationale for slavery. In a society where the mass of the population was very poor, it was probably as cheap to employ casual labour when needed as to buy a slave and maintain his or her fitness throughout the year. Rome was not a slave society in the sense that the economy was dependent on slavery for its survival. The mines in Spain may have been worked largely by slaves but those in Gaul were probably not. No section of the economy would have collapsed if there had been no slaves. Rather, as Keith Bradley puts it: 'The social and economic benefits that accrued to owners derived from their almost limitless abilities to control and coerce human property.' Such control not only made life easier, with every comfort catered for, but reinforced the owner as a free and hence socially respected individual. Throughout his banquet Trimalchio enjoys playing with his slaves' feelings, sometimes threatening force, sometimes promising a grant of freedom, conscious that by doing so he is displaying his new-found power.

Attitudes to slaves must have been conditioned by their large numbers and memories of the great slave revolts of the republic, those in Sicily in the 130s BC and the uprising of Spartacus in 73 BC, both of which attracted more than 70,000 slaves. There were a number of minor revolts or the murders of brutal masters, probably by slaves driven to desperation or having a misguided belief that they could achieve freedom. The custom of executing all the slaves in a household when the master had been murdered by one (see pp. 497–8) again shows the depth of fear and how, characteristically, the use of terror was the means of dealing with it. In the mid-second century AD there were a few humanitarian initiatives by the emperors. Hadrian forbade the castration of slaves and the shackling of those employed in agricultural estates, Antoninus Pius tightened the restrictions on the use of torture, but there was no effective way of restraining the brutality of owners who were that way inclined. An example of how horrifying things could be is found in one of Cicero's cases where he describes how a mistress, Sassia, tried to force a slave to incriminate her son on a charge of murdering her stepfather. The slave, as was customary, was tortured in front of witnesses to tell the 'truth'. When the required 'confession' was not forthcoming Sassia urged the torturers on so sadistically that in the end the witnesses could not stomach the ordeal any longer and had to force her to desist.

In the writings of the agriculturalist Columella (mid-first century AD) slaves are treated as if they are naturally deceitful and need constant supervision. He mentions in passing the practice Hadrian tried to outlaw in the following century: of keeping slaves chained together while they work and secured in prisons (*ergastula*) at night. It must have been in those situations where slaves were employed in the mass, whether on the farms or in the mines, that everyday treatment would have been at its most harsh.

In the domestic setting the position of individual slaves was more ambiguous. The extent to which slaves serviced the home of an elite family can be seen from the excavated burial chambers of the slaves and freedmen of the Statilii family (Tiberius Statilius Taurus had been a general of Augustus) on the Via Labicana outside Rome. They include a mass of personal attendants, hairdressers, wet nurses, child-minders, tutors, doctors, masseurs, and even a resident midwife. Spinners, weavers, dyers,

fullers, and shoemakers clothed the family while their financial affairs were managed by accountants and secretaries. When they went out and about they had bodyguards from Germany and litter bearers. They even employed slaves to maintain the amphitheatre in Rome that they had donated to the city. It would have been impossible for some bonds of loyalty and affection not to have grown up between master and servant and here they were given their own burial chambers on the family estate as if they were recognized as belonging to the family unit. A secure and well-managed household might actually offer a better life for the slave than the streets and farms outside. (There is a fascinating example from the early fifth century when the Christian ascetic Melania the Younger freed 4,000 of her slaves as part of her renunciation of her wealth. They protested vigorously, afraid no doubt of being thrown unprotected out onto the job market.) While slaves could not be legally married, liaisons, with children born to them, were common (and recorded in the Statilii epitaphs), and many owners condoned these 'family' arrangements, preferring slaves who had been born into slavery to those bought in from the outside world. (Columella also refers to the civilizing influence of women in the otherwise all-male world of the agricultural slave.)

However, there was never a guaranteed protection from violence, ill-treatment, and sexual harassment. The children of slaves could be sold separately from their parents and the plucky slave-girl, Fotis, who initiates and enjoys sex with the 'hero' Lucius in Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, cannot be assumed to be typical. Every form of sexual abuse must have been common. Trimalchio boasts that his freedom was granted after he had satisfied the desires of both his master and mistress. Despite the problems of assessing the numbers of slaves and even with the possibility of manumission, Roman slavery was far more pervasive than the Arabic slave trade in the Indian Ocean or the Atlantic slave trade and so provides a sobering perspective on the nature of Roman 'civilization'.

(There are excellent discussions of all aspects of Roman slavery in chapters 11 to 19 in Bradley and Cartledge (eds.), *The Cambridge History of World Slavery*, i: *Slavery in the Ancient Mediterranean*.)

Manumission and Freedmen

Where Rome differed from Greece was that slaves could be freed and their descendants become full citizens. So when, in an area where citizenship was rare, as it still was in the first century AD, we come across a Roman citizen of middling status who is not Italian, the most likely reason is that he is descended from a freed slave. This was probably the reason why the apostle Paul enjoyed citizenship at a time when it was virtually unknown even among the elite of Asia Minor. (A view argued by Jerome Murphy O'Connor in his biographies of Paul.)

Manumission was an ancient concept found as far back as the Twelve Tables of the fifth century BC. An owner could set a slave free by means of a declaration in front of the magistrate or through the terms of his will. Alternatively a slave could

buy his freedom, if the owner agreed, by offering the owner compensation from whatever he might have saved. The number of slaves an owner could free through a will was, however, limited by a law of Augustus. An owner of between thirty and a hundred slaves could free no more than a quarter of them, one with over a hundred slaves only a fifth. Manumission brought freedom for only a minority of slaves and inevitably those who were freed during an owner's lifetime tended to be those who had earned his respect. Cicero's freedman Tiro enjoyed the genuine affection of his former master. The freedman was subject to some continuing restrictions, in his choice of marriage partners (marriages between freedmen and freedwomen were common) and in the way he could leave his wealth, but his children enjoyed the full rights of any citizen.

Most freedmen remained close to their previous owners and were supported by them in their new lives, often as tradesmen and craftsmen in the cities, and even buried in their family tombs. In return their former owners could expect complete loyalty. This explains why emperors such as Claudius used freedmen so extensively. Traditional Romans, however, viewed the rise of the freedman to a position of wealth with horror. Again, the depiction of Trimalchio in Petronius' *Satyricon* is the classic example from literature. The old arguments enunciated by Theognis 700 years earlier (see p. 230), that no amount of wealth could create nobility, reappear in this context. Seneca recorded with horror the case of a former master calling on the home of his manumitted slave and being refused admittance by the now arrogant freedman! However, the Romans were a pragmatic people and ancestry could be forgotten at times of crisis. Horace's father was a freedman, his son ended up as an intimate of Augustus. The philosopher Epictetus was born a slave in Asia (in the middle of the first century AD), suffering the extra handicap of being lame. Yet after being freed he spent much time in Rome mingling with the elite and later in his life he may even have been introduced to Hadrian. The emperor Diocletian may have himself been a freed slave or at least the son of one.

Land and Survival in the Roman Empire

We note with certainty that the world grows better cultivated and better supplied with everything than it used to be. Everything is accessible, everything is known, everything is used; delightful rural domains have forced famous deserts to retreat, furrows have tamed the forests, herds have put wild animals to flight... stretches of sand have been sown with seed, roads are opened through the rocks, marshlands are drained, there are as many towns as there once were houses,... Everywhere there are dwellings, peoples, cities, life. (The church father Tertullian, c.210)

The economy of the Roman empire depended overwhelmingly on agriculture. Throughout the Roman period the staples of the Mediterranean 'dry farming' economy remained, as they had been in earlier times, olives and grapes, supplemented by cereal crops, and cattle, pigs, sheep, and goats for meat, milk, wool, and leather. In the north of Europe, where the hours of sunshine are limited and the soils are heavier, olives would not grow at all and vines only on specially favoured

sites. Here cereal and vegetable production was predominant. In many areas little happened to change the traditional mix of crops. In Egypt, for instance, the centuries-old methods of production of grain continued and it appears that the emperors (whose 'personal' province this was) actively discouraged any economic development that might threaten the grain surplus with which they maintained the political stability of Rome and other parts of the empire. The cities of the east had long-established relationships with their hinterlands and there was no incentive to disturb these. In Britain the native field systems, which had already been well farmed in the Iron Age, were largely preserved intact (with some lengthening of the fields as ploughing became more efficient). The concentration on cereals, which had produced a surplus for export to the Continent even before the Roman conquest, continued. However, the Romans brought the cultivation of vines to Britain (now being revived with success as the climate warms!) and many of the staples of today's vegetable gardens, asparagus, beetroot, cabbage, carrots, and celery.

The long centuries of settled Roman rule did, therefore, have their impact, even if not to the extent suggested by Tertullian. 'Progress', however, is not easy to quantify largely because the evidence needed to chart longer-term trends is so fragmentary. For agriculture in Italy there are some literary sources—Cato's *De Agricultura* in the second century BC and Columella's *De Re Rustica* in the first century AD. Both are instruction manuals specifically aimed at the larger landowner hoping to exploit local markets (there is much on the processing of goods for market and the management of slaves), but the information they give is of only limited relevance, even for Italy. The *Natural History* of the elder Pliny, the uncle of Pliny the Younger, does range beyond Italy but not in any systematic way. Increasingly it is the archaeologist, working through field surveys and the analysis of villa sites, who has provided the significant evidence for agricultural change.

There is accumulating evidence, from these studies, that farmers as a whole benefited from the *pax Romana*, the centuries of stable Roman rule. In normal times they could get on with their work without interruption. Comparative studies of Greek and Roman agriculture suggest that the Romans were more actively engaged in adapting the landscape to their needs than the Greeks were. Analyses of pollen and settlement patterns suggest that the amount of land cultivated increased and that population grew to be higher in the first centuries AD than 1,000 years earlier or 500 years later. There is also evidence for some increase in productivity, that is the yield of crops per unit of land. One can spot a variety of improved methods including the diffusion of iron tools and screw presses (for oil production) along an axis from the south-east to the north-west of the empire. The increasing use of metal was especially important. The development of hay scythes, for instance, saw the emergence of the meadows dedicated to hay with spin-offs for the winter survival of horses and cattle. The mouldboard plough, first appearing in the third century AD, with a metal share dug deeper into the ground and turned the soil, so releasing more nutrients. It was especially effective in heavier soils north of the Alps. As important in bringing about any rise in productivity was probably the growing knowledge—accumulated over many years of stability—of how to maximize the potential of any given piece of

land. (For the topics discussed here and below, chapters 20 to 27 of *The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-World*, ed. Walter Scheidel et al., Cambridge, 2007, provide the best up-to-date survey of the complex evidence.)

The Villa

Although it is impossible to generalize across the empire as a whole over several hundred years, it appears that there was a growth in the number of medium-sized or large estates farmed by tenants, slaves, or free labour at the expense of smaller peasant farms, although the latter still formed the vast majority of agricultural homesteads. It was these estates which supported the most pervasive symbol of Roman influence in the provinces, the villa. The term 'villa' is a broad one covering both the palatial establishments of the Roman rich on the Bay of Naples and the comfortable farmhouses found throughout the provinces. (The finest literary description of a grand country villa comes in the letters of Pliny the Younger (Book II, Letter 17).)

For a farmhouse in the provinces to qualify as a villa, there has to be some evidence of Romanization, either in the design of the building or in its furnishings. This process of Romanization was often cumulative, and can sometimes be traced by excavation. A native farmhouse might originally consist of a single large room shared by animals and people (with the manure heap to keep them warm as was the custom in parts of southern Italy well into the twentieth century). The first sign of

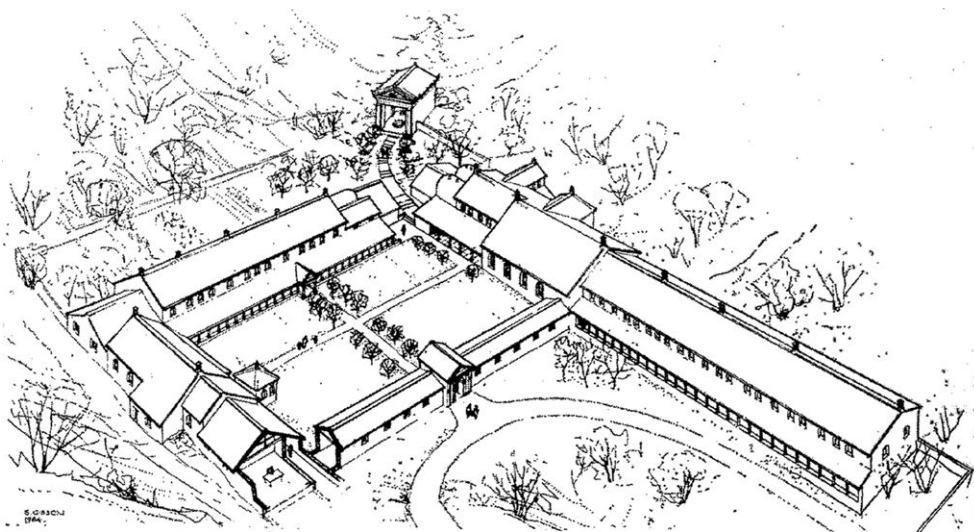


FIG. 8 The villa at Chedworth in Britain, c.AD 300. This is a good example of a comfortable domestic home with its own secluded courtyard alongside an open courtyard where the business of the estate would be carried on.

progress would be the segregation of the owner from his animals. Then rooms for living and sleeping would be built to separate him from his workers. If prosperity continued luxuries could follow—baths and heating systems, corridors, mosaics, and painted wall-plaster. Finally the façade of a grand villa might be turned away from the farmyard and graced by a portico. A larger villa would extend its rooms so as to enclose a courtyard or garden where the family could enjoy the open air in some seclusion. These were all improvements that spread in the first instance from Italy. Field surveys are showing just how widespread the villa became in the more fertile areas of the empire. One recent survey of the Somme valley in northern France, for instance, found over a thousand examples. The process often began in the west a generation or two after conquest—in Gaul, for instance, at the end of the first century BC, in Britain not until the end of the second century. (British villas enjoyed their finest period of prosperity only in the fourth century but even then they make up only 2 per cent of the farms surveyed.)

Villas required craftsmen, builders, plasterers, tilers, and mosaic layers. Typically the owners would also buy in all the trappings of civilized Roman living, including glass and silverware, and the fine Samian pottery (*terra sigillata*) with its red gloss and raised designs. (The presence of the last on a site is particularly important for the archaeologist because the styles can be dated.) This suggests links with local market centres and provides further evidence that there was a surplus of agricultural produce that could be sold to buy these skills and goods. There is no doubt that there was an economic symbiosis between villa and urban centre. It has been shown that in Britain, for instance, almost all villas are within half a day's ride of a town. The French archaeologist Michel Ponsich has traced the varied links between villas in the valley of the Guadalquivir in Spain and local townships. The produce brought into the towns might then be taken downriver to the sea (near the Straits of Gibraltar) and shipped north to Britain and Gaul or eastwards into the Mediterranean. (Ponsich's work is cited by Kevin Greene in his *The Archaeology of the Roman Economy*, London, 1986. For the British villa, see part iv of David Mattingley's *An Imperial Possession: Britain in the Roman Empire*, London and New York, 2006, 'The Rural Communities'.)

Cities and the Economy

The vast majority of the cities of the empire supported themselves through the fruits of local agriculture, either brought in directly for sale or transferred from the landed estates of the elite into building programmes. (The second-century AD physician Galen mentions how, in times of famine, raiders from the city would strip the countryside bare.) A few benefited directly as sea or river ports from the increase in trade that the *pax Romana* brought to the empire (see further below). The commercial city able to maintain itself from trade or industry alone was unknown although some cities such as Aquileia in the northern Adriatic gained substantial wealth as an entrepôt for trade (in this case from northern Europe). One can still walk along

the excavated dockside at Aquileia and see where boats were tied up to be unloaded. Major wharves have been discovered on the banks of the Thames at London and on the Rhine at Vetera, the modern Xanten.

No city had a more artificial economic status than Rome, with its population of over a million by the time of Augustus. Rome fulfilled many roles beyond that of the purely administrative. It was the showcase of the empire, its monumental buildings deeply embedded in ancient rituals and enduring reminders of its great emperors and many victories. The contentment of its volatile population required the importing of an estimated 190,000 tonnes of grain a year. Wheat was preferred to the less nutritious barley. Olive oil was also important. The discarded oil amphorae still heaped up beside the Tiber, the Monte Testaccio, number an estimated 65 million. Although the city was supplied through private enterprise, at first from grain surpluses in Italy and Sicily, the emperors came to exercise substantial control over the process of supply, even providing the surplus of their own estates. The grain of Egypt, the emperor's personal province, was increasingly drawn on with the grain being collected from peasant farmers directly as tax. (Alexandria became the most important exporting centre of the empire.)

With so much grain coming to Rome from across the Mediterranean, a major problem was finding carriers and, as has been seen, Claudius showed his pragmatic approach to such matters by offering citizenship or exemption from tax to those who signed six-year contracts to bring ship loads of at least 70 tonnes of wheat each year. In Hadrian's day the corn traders could gain exemption from other public duties. In Rome itself a *praefectus annonae* had overall supervision of supplies but the emperors also played a major role in developing the port of Ostia. Originally Ostia had been a river port but its frontage was too small to take the number and size of ships now required to supply Rome so under Claudius and then Trajan a seaport (Portus) was constructed and this eventually became the focus of commercial activities. By the middle of the second century Ostia had a population of some 50,000 and its mass of merchants, shipowners, trade associations, and supporting clerical staff made it one of the few 'middle-class' cities of the empire. Its Square of the Guilds has mosaics illustrating its main trades, rope makers, tanners, timber merchants, and shipowners among them. There is even a record of an elephant importer! Aerial surveys suggest that a canal ran alongside the Tiber to prevent traffic jams for goods on the way to Rome.

The relationship between cities, such as Rome, and local economies elsewhere can be explored through north Africa, another part of the empire that helped sustain Rome through its grain and other produce. As the Romans incorporated the Carthaginian territories and client states into the empire, the land was surveyed and divided into plots. Surveys of surviving Roman milestones show that 19,200 kilometres of roads were built. As elsewhere, the basis of Africa's wealth was agricultural, predominantly olives and grain. The region had more rainfall in winter and a more stable climate in summer than today and yields were high so that farmers were left with a healthy surplus. The hungry population of Rome was a short voyage away across the Mediterranean with Carthage, now refounded as a Roman city,

acting as the connecting port with Ostia. (Shipowners from Carthage are notable in inscriptions in Ostia itself.) Africa was also an important source of marble. (Particularly favoured was the veined yellow and red marble from Smitthu in Numidia, used, for instance, in the Pantheon.) From the second century BC African pottery was also sold throughout the empire.

The overall effect of the incoming wealth was to stimulate and sustain a large number of towns. In origin these were a mix of ancient Phoenician cities, Roman garrison towns, citizen colonies, and local market towns (many of whom were to be given the status of a *municipium*). In what is now northern Tunisia there were some 200 towns at an average distance from each other of only 10 kilometres. A typical population of one of the north African cities might be between 5,000 and 15,000. About a dozen had a population of over 20,000 (the rebuilt Carthage may have had 100,000, Leptis Magna 80,000). The remains of these cities, with their theatres, temples (often dedicated to the Roman pantheon, Juno, Jupiter, and Minerva), triumphal arches, and gateways still scattering the landscape, attest to the success of the Romans in creating a common imperial culture even if, ultimately, all this prosperity rested on exploiting the artificial 'pull' of Rome. (Susan Raven, *Rome in Africa*, 3rd edition, London and New York, 1993, still provides a good introduction, while Philip Kenrick is providing up-to-date surveys on Libyan sites.)

A good example of a small port growing prosperous on the fruits of agriculture and associated products is Pompeii on the Bay of Naples. The city was destroyed in August AD 79 by a colossal eruption of the volcano Vesuvius. Much was preserved under the ash and it has been possible to piece together the details of almost every aspect of social and economic life in the city. It makes an excellent case study. (See Mary Beard, *Pompeii: The Life of a Roman Town*, London, 2008; Paul Roberts, *Life and Death in Pompeii and Herculaneum*, London, 2013; and Joanne Berry, *The Complete Pompeii*, London and New York, 2007.)

The wealth of Pompeii originated in the surrounding countryside of Campania and came predominantly from wine and olive oil. By the mid-first century AD wool-processing was also an expanding industry with raw wool being brought down from the Samnite highlands for treatment in the city. As the most important port (now silted up as the coastline receded) of its stretch of the coastline Pompeii was ideally placed to export these goods throughout the Mediterranean, and wine amphorae from the town have been found in France. Business must also have benefited from the local villas of the rich with all their needs for building materials and other supplies. What industry there was in Pompeii was related to the marketing of agricultural goods. Pottery production, for instance, centred on the amphorae in which wine, oil, and other local produce could be exported. At the time the city was destroyed, however, there are some indications that its traditional export markets were declining as provincials began developing their own vineyards and making their own pottery. The reversal in trading relationships has been demonstrated in Pompeii by a crate of imported red-gloss pottery arrived from southern Gaul just before the eruption. There is no better place to plot the economics of everyday life in the food shops, taverns, and brothels that made up the typical provincial Roman

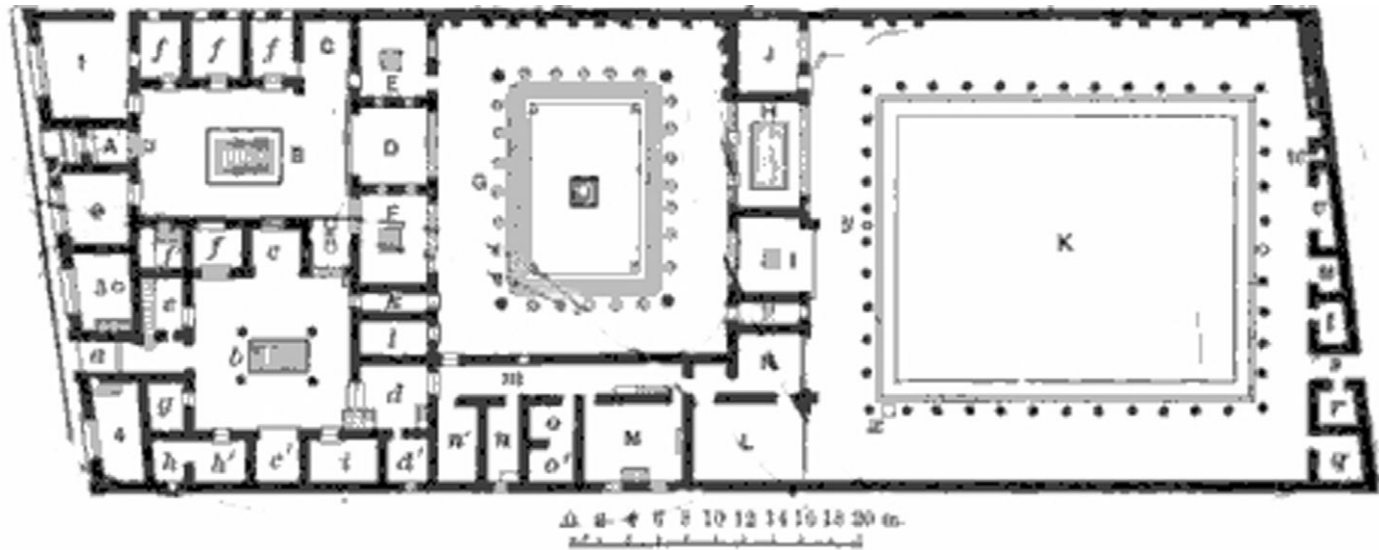


FIG. 9 House of the Dancing Faun, Pompeii. This, the largest house so far excavated in Pompeii (1830–2), occupied a whole block (*insula*) in the town. It dates from the second century BC and preserved its original opulent decoration of that date. The front of the house was occupied by shops (1–4). The visitor entered over a mosaiced pavement at A into an *atrium* (B) where the statue of the Faun stood. If on business, the visitor would meet the owner of the house in the *tablinum* (D). The *tablinum* looked out over the peristyle (G) and had a dining room either side (E and F) with two further dining rooms (J and I) off this first peristyle. Between these two was the famous mosaic of Alexander at the Battle of Issus (330 BC). Such is its quality that some believe an ancestor of the owner must have fought in the battle. The house is unusual in having servants' quarters around a secondary atrium (b) with a subsidiary entrance (a) and a passage (m) along which the servants could move without disturbing the owners. A kitchen was at M. Finally there was a large second peristyle (K) with quarters for the gardener (q) and keeper of the back door (r).

city. (There remain mysteries. The insides of the storage jars found embedded in counters in the taverns are not glazed so could not have held liquid. So what was sold from them? The only produce actually found in any is walnuts!)

If north Africa showed how a large region could benefit from access to Rome and the wider Mediterranean economy, the army also had its own economic impact. Soldiers were comparatively well paid and there could be several thousand men in a single garrison, such as Vetera on the Rhine. It has been estimated that the agricultural surplus of the surrounding farmlands of the northern border could meet only half of the legions' food needs. So there were lucrative commercial opportunities to be had for importers, and evidence from the sprawling townships that emerged near the camps suggests that traders were attracted from far afield. On the forts along the Rhine and Danube, the remains of luxury goods, fine tableware from Italy and Gaul, spices from the east, and exotic glassware from Egypt, have been found. Legionaries often kept their families in the townships and in some cases went to live in them when they retired. Although some of the townships appear to have developed their own form of government (complete with magistrates) they normally remained subject to the camp. On occasions a township might be fortified by the legion but there were instances (at Vetera, during the revolt of Julius Civilis, for instance) when a township was razed by the legions to prevent it being used as a base by insurgents.

Trade Routes

In the past thirty years there has been a massive increase in the number of known wrecks in the Mediterranean, many of which have been excavated. The evidence is, however, difficult to interpret. It is clear that one of the largest staples of trade was grain. However, when a grain ship is wrecked the grain disperses, the ship reaches the bottom empty and is broken up by currents. Not a single wreck of a grain ship has yet been found. A ship carrying amphorae or marble, on the other hand, sinks with its cargo to the bottom and the hull is often protected by their weight and so remains in place to be rediscovered. The number of known wrecks begins to go into decline in the second century AD although those carrying marble reach a new peak, understandably in view of the great building programmes of the cities. So one might say that trade, other than in marble, was in decline but there is also evidence that amphorae were being replaced by wooden barrels which would, of course, disintegrate fairly soon after a wreck leaving the ship itself exposed to the elements. So a decline in the number of wrecks found is not necessarily an indication of failing trade.

After 150 BC the size of ships grew steadily and during the republic there are already ships as large as 450–500 tonnes. The Albenga shipwreck of 100 to 90 BC, for instance, was of this size. It was carrying wine from Italy to southern Gaul and had some 10,000 amphorae on board, no less than some 260,000 litres of wine. As the Gauls were known to pay well for their wines this represented an enormous

investment, all in this case lost on the seabed. Between 100 BC and AD 200 there is good evidence for larger ships carrying amphorae and marble of between 300 and 500 tonnes. Grain ships must have been even larger. They had excellent harbour facilities in Alexandria and Carthage and at Portus, the harbour constructed by Claudius and Trajan close to Ostia. Some estimates suggest that the grain ships could have reached 1,000 to 1,300 tonnes. There is a literary reference to a ship of 1,200 tonnes, the *Isis*, by the second-century AD writer Lucian. These figures remain speculative until actual examples are found.

Amphorae were the ubiquitous storage jar, carrying wine, oil, fish products, even nuts and preserved fruits. There is good evidence that they carried vast quantities of wine to Gaul in the republican period. In the first and second centuries AD, there was a substantial increase in amphorae carrying salted fish and *garum*, a spicy fish sauce. The extent of the trade can be gauged from the spread of salting factories. The salting pans were placed where the migrations of fish allowed for enormous catches, far greater than would be needed for local consumption. Between AD 50 and AD 200 there was a steady flow of fish products from factories in southern Spain and north Africa. A new processing area began in Brittany in the second half of the first century AD with a surge in production after AD 150 when the second largest known factory in the Roman world at Polmarc'h became active. Inscriptions suggest that the established entrepreneurs had moved up from the factories in the Mediterranean. It was uncommon, however, for a ship to carry a single staple. So the wreck known as Port Vendres II, dated to the 40s AD, is of a ship making its way along the coast from Spain towards Gaul, aiming either to off-load its cargo on the Rhône or at an Italian port. It appears to have had the goods of eleven distinct merchants. The amphorae contained wine and olive oil and fish sauce, with smaller decorative items such as glass, fine pottery, and metalware, tin, copper, and lead.

As only a tiny section of the population had the spare capital to buy such items, the market for these smaller luxury items was, inevitably, small as a proportion of the whole, though some commodities such as silverware were popular among a wider clientele. Stamped amphorae suggest a discriminating market for the better-quality goods from elite areas of production, claret-type wine from southern Italy (marked with the name of the estate and the vintage), the heady white Falerian wine that was a favourite of Horace and Catullus, Spanish fish sauce, and oil from Baetica (in the province of Further Spain). The important cloth industry had its own specialist centres, Sicily and Malta, for the most luxurious cloths. In his *Natural History*, Pliny talks of the best flax coming from eastern Spain with two centres in Italy running it a close second.

Of course, trade was not confined to the Mediterranean. Ivory came in from eastern Africa (via Nubia), incense and myrrh from Arabia, amber from the Baltic coast. Routes spread far towards the east, including into India. Roman coins there, discovered in increasing numbers in the nineteenth century, were first treated as no more than curiosities but there are now enough to show that imported silver coins peaked in the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius (and were often recycled with new

markings to use as local coinage). The coins, gold, wine, and olive oil made up the Roman exports. Arikamedu, near modern Pondicherry, was a well-placed port, situated on the coast but with access by water inland, and so developed into an entrepôt for the trade. Excavations have uncovered warehouses, amphorae, and first-century Arretine ware. Perfumes, spices, primarily pepper and cardamon, ivory, gemstones, and textiles from as far east as China were brought back across the Arabian Sea and then channelled through Alexandria. The only documented case of a ship returning from India, from the mid-second century, records a value of goods equivalent to 23,000 tonnes of wheat, so there were rich pickings to be had for the owners as well as the numerous artisans who reworked the materials when they arrived in Egypt. Many goods went on to Rome where they were stored in vast warehouses, the *horrea*, on the banks of the Tiber. Rome was certainly a bustling commercial city. Pliny the Elder lists nine different types of writing paper, twelve kinds of plums, and twenty-seven varieties of linen on sale there and it is assumed that vanished commodities of the fallen Babylon set out in chapter 8 of the Book of Revelation are inspired by those luxuries available in Rome. (See further Claire Holleran, *Shopping in Ancient Rome*, Oxford, 2012.)

In the first century AD many commodities could command an empire-wide market but the trend was for local production to rival these foreign imports and this may be one reason for an apparent decline in Mediterranean trade in the second century AD. The origin of Samian ware was Arezzo in central Italy where the clay was especially fine and from where the pottery was exported. New centres of production then appeared in Gaul, first at Lugdunum and later southern Gaul. An analysis of amphorae found in shipwrecks show that Spanish and Gallic Samian ware became more important during the first century AD. The kilns at La Graufesenque in south-west France could fire 30,000 high-quality pots in a single firing and the products were sold throughout western Europe and across to the coast of north Africa. Standards were high as can be seen from the pits full of rejected 'seconds'. From this period on it is only occasionally that a local industry achieves a market extending beyond its neighbouring provinces. One example is the astonishing success of African pottery after the second century BC. It is found penetrating the eastern Mediterranean and even the Black Sea. Gallic cloth and clothing became the fashion in Italy in the third century.

The rise of provincial craftsmanship meant that many raw materials would now be processed at their destination. The copper, tin, and lead of the Port Vendres shipwreck would have been worked up in Gaul or Italy. The area around Capua in Campania was particularly known for its work in copper and silver. The imperial mint at Lyon was using lead and silver from Spain. Lead from Britain has been found in the coins of Augustus, Tiberius, and Nero. Marble was cut in rough shapes, and these became standardized with time so that one could order column shafts and capitals, even sarcophagi with garlands and swags outlined on the sides, direct from the quarry. Surfaces were left rough because any finer work might have been damaged in transport. Some unfinished temples, Didyma in Asia Minor, for instance, have wall surfaces that were never smoothed. A standardized statue form, nude or

clothed in a toga, would be left unfinished so that the local recipients could add in the head of the man to be honoured. Altogether the patterns of production were becoming more complex.

An Imperial Economy?

There has been intense controversy over the social and economic impact of trade on the empire as a whole. In *The Ancient Economy* (Berkeley, 1973) Moses Finley suggested that trade had a very limited role to play in the social and economic development of the empire. He argued that the staples of the agricultural economy were uniform throughout the Mediterranean basin so there was little incentive for one area to trade with another. The cost of transport was another factor inhibiting exchange as it would price traded goods well above the same goods produced locally. (This would explain why the development of oil, wine, and pottery production in the provinces in the settled years of the empire might threaten the traditional centres of production such as Italy.) Finley also pointed out that the status of traders remained low and that as soon as they had made profits they tended to invest them in land. It was not the lure of money as such which stimulated economic activity but the search for status, achieved through landownership, public office, and displays of largesse in the city centres. Finley concluded that the forces that dictated the movements of goods were not those of the market but those imposed by the state in its determination to keep the imperial structure, the prestigious cities such as Rome, and the legions, intact through the provision of grain and other basic necessities.

Finley's thesis has now been strongly challenged. Surpluses from agriculture might have been small and unpredictable but there is evidence that they were traded in local markets. The use of coins was widespread with evidence also for commercial loans and shared risk investment. Coins would not have been found in so many contexts if small-scale trading had not been significant. Even humble homes had access to fine pottery and glass. Tiled houses were common in a way they had never been before.

There is also a much more positive picture of ingenuity and innovation than anything conceived by Finley. Archaeology is continuously expanding our knowledge of these developments and they show how the unity of the empire encouraged the spread of new techniques. The earliest glass-blowing tubes have been found in Jerusalem dating to the first half of the first century BC but the technique spread throughout the empire in the first century AD and made glass available to everyone. A glass cup could be bought for a copper coin according to Strabo.

Water-lifting devices first appear in Egypt (certainly by 1300 BC) but become more sophisticated in the Hellenistic period. With Egypt incorporated into the empire they spread so that an example has been found in London dated as early as AD 63. It served a deep well and would have been able to provide large quantities of water, possibly to a neighbouring bath house or the city's amphitheatre. Its design is unique and this suggests that once the concept had been grasped the Romans pragmatically

made their own models to suit local demands. Animal-powered water-lifting wheels, known in Alexandria in the third century BC, were similarly adapted to power under-shot watermills. These become important from the first century AD onwards and the finds and reconstructions of watermills show a high degree of innovation and flexibility in the way that waterwheels, often with gears, were used throughout the empire. The milling of grain was their most important function but there is evidence that water was used to power sawmills and crush ores. Water, it is now being argued, was a power source hardly mentioned in the literature that may, in fact, have been fundamental in raising levels of production. (See John Peter Oleson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Engineering and Technology in the Classical World*, Oxford, 2008, for a wide-ranging survey of these developments.)

What was lacking was any vision of economic progress, any idea that the growth of wealth was an end in itself. What did exist, however, were the conditions in which enterprise could flourish through those classes, notably the freedmen, and individuals who grasped the opportunities that the *pax Romana* offered. There would always be restraints on agricultural production—this was the nature of the environment—but there was room for steady improvement of yields. Roman technology did advance and many techniques were adopted widely even if there never was a breakthrough to higher levels of production in the sense of the eighteenth-century Industrial Revolution. In short, one can talk of not one but two coexisting imperial economies, one driven by the state in its need to supply Rome and the legions, the other by free enterprise.

INTERLUDE 9

The Romans as Builders

The geographer Strabo, writing in Augustus' reign, praised the Greeks for always placing their cities in the finest environments where natural harbours and landscape could be used as backdrops for beautiful buildings. In contrast, the Romans were, he argued, pragmatic: primarily great builders of roads, aqueducts, sewers, and, when they needed to, harbours, such as the one at Ostia. In fact, Roman buildings had many uses beyond the purely functional and students of Roman art show increasing appreciation of its aesthetic quality. A fountain delivers water but it can also offer a satisfying backdrop to a long street and will provide a memorial to the generosity of its builder. There was no structural reason for facing a building with costly marble, usually brought precariously across the Mediterranean from Africa, but it was intrinsic in giving status to a monument. So any study of the Romans as builders encompasses not only the problems of construction and questions of what the building was designed to provide but who initiated the project, what they hoped to gain from it, and its visual impact. Certainly the Romans had an eye for harmony and proportion. Vitruvius (see further below) insisted that a building must be attractive. 'The principle of attractiveness will be upheld when the appearance of the work is pleasing and elegant, and the proportions of its elements have properly developed principles of symmetry.' (See, in general, Jean-Pierre Adam, *Roman Building: Materials and Techniques*, trans. Anthony Mathews, London and New York, 2005, and Mark Wilson-Jones, *Principles of Roman Architecture*, New Haven and London, 2000.)

Cities were always the focus of Roman civilization, the centres of administration, and collecting points for taxes. It was where the local elites congregated and competed with each other as benefactors, as the inscriptions on so many buildings proudly proclaim. Cities were also vying for status with their neighbours. Nîmes and Arles, in southern Gaul, appear to have had a battle at the end of the first century AD as each strove to outdo the other in the grandeur of their amphitheatres.

As an example of the creation of a new city, one can trace the architectural development of a Roman colony, the Colonia Augusta Emerita, the modern Meridian in south-west Spain, from its foundation for soldiers discharged from Augustus' Spanish campaigns in 25 BC. Up to then it had only been a minor settlement. First, and crucially, it was linked into the road network by a major bridge over the river Anas. Then the plan of the city was laid out and this was enclosed with walls with spaces designated inside for the city forum. A temple to the cult of the emperors was soon

in place and both Augustus and Agrippa, his son-in-law, made benefactions, Agrippa a theatre, Augustus an amphitheatre.

Within nine years the *colonia* had been elevated to the capital of the province of Lusitania. Three aqueducts were feeding water into the city by AD 50. The original forum was joined by another in the same way that imperial fora had accumulated in central Rome—in fact the second forum seems to have been modelled on that of Augustus in Rome. The determination to flaunt the growing status of the city could be seen when another open space was created in the centre by demolishing private housing and then adding yet another forum, this one with porticos and a monumental entrance gate. There were many statues, notably a group showing Aeneas fleeing Troy for Italy so pinning the new city into Roman mythology. By AD 75, Colonia Augusta Emerita offered an impressive backdrop for imperial administration and provided a model that other cities would follow. While a *colonia* was always the creation of the state and its main benefactors often the imperial family, it was the elite of the *municipia* who would initiate their own building programmes. (See further Jonathan Edmondson, ‘Cities and Urban Life in the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire’, in D. Potter (ed.), *A Companion to the Roman Empire*, Oxford, 2006.)

If there was a birthplace of a distinctive Roman architecture it was not Rome, nor even Greece, but the cities of coastal Campania, wealthy settlements along the Bay of Naples to the south of Rome. The sheltered coastline had been open to eastern influences for centuries and the cultural development of the area was in many ways more advanced than that of Latium. It is to this area that the emergence of the typical Roman stone building types, the amphitheatre, the theatre (in its Roman form), and almost certainly the Roman bath, the market building, and the basilica, can be traced. Here too the typical Roman house with its *atrium* (central court) and enclosed colonnaded garden was born.

Of these the most obviously Greek in conception was the basilica, a long hall framed on each side by a colonnaded aisle. Its origins were probably in the Greek-speaking cities of southern Italy but a very early example (early second century BC) has been found beside the Forum at Pompeii. The preservation of Pompeii as a result of the great volcanic eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79 has allowed the architectural development of a Campanian city to be studied in detail. In the second and early first centuries BC Pompeii, whose heritage was Greek but which had been overrun by the Samnites in the fifth century, had already acquired a full complement of urban buildings, including theatres, an amphitheatre, bath houses, and market buildings. Two of the bath houses pre-date any in Rome by a century, while Rome had no stone theatre before Pompey’s in 55 BC (and even that had to be disguised as a temple) and no stone amphitheatre before the Colosseum (dedicated in AD 80). Even a small Campanian town such as Pompeii had achieved a sophisticated life-style long before the same was available in Rome.

By the first century BC Rome did, of course, have its great public buildings around the Forum, its temples, senate house, halls for the public assemblies, and state offices. There were market halls and great warehouses. However, it was not until the reign of Augustus that the city was transformed ‘from brick to marble’. From this

time on imperial patronage was to be an essential component in architectural development. Only the emperors had the resources and political need to make a major impact on architecture while the stability of imperial rule stimulated the spread of building throughout the empire. Earlier traditions of town planning from the Greek world combined with this stimulus and the renewed prosperity of a settled empire to create the typical Roman town, with its grid plan, central forum, and surrounding public buildings.

One of the inspirations of this urban renewal came from an engineer, Vitruvius, responsible for a great basilica in the town of Fano on the Adriatic coast. In his treatise *De Architectura*, in which he laid down the requirements of good building (for his legacy see p. 675 below), Vitruvius puts 'soundness' and 'utility' alongside attractiveness. 'Soundness' was achieved by putting firm foundations in place and using building materials that were appropriate to the structure to be built. 'Utility' required spaces that were 'properly orientated, appropriate and comfortable' and that could be passed through without difficulty. Vitruvius set out a shopping list of buildings and urban accessories that any self-respecting Roman town ought to have. Among the essentials were paved streets and drains, an aqueduct to bring in fresh water (not least to supply the public and private baths), an amphitheatre and a theatre, a forum, temples, and basilicas for public business. City walls were to be built, in some cases for defence, but more often as a mark of civic pride, and the centre of the town might be graced with commemorative arches and statues of its prominent citizens and benefactors. Many Italian towns achieved all these buildings quite rapidly.

Large cities depended on efficient water supplies. The earliest Romans drank from the Tiber but by the late fourth century BC alternative sources were needed. While the aqueduct was not a Roman invention (earlier examples have been found in Persia and seventh-century Assyria) it was a building form that Roman engineers made their own. The first aqueduct of Rome, the Aqua Appia, had been constructed as early as 312 BC. It was 17 kilometres long. As the city grew engineers began probing ever further into the Campagna, the countryside round Rome, for water. The Aqua Marcia of 144 BC, for instance, ran for 92 kilometres from the east of the city and is estimated to have brought in a million litres of water an hour. The problem facing the engineers was how to secure a regular flow from higher to lower ground. The Aqua Marcia had a fall of 260 metres, one metre for every 354 metres in length, and the route had to be planned to keep this fall constant. (Roman architects were also able to use a siphon system to take water down across a valley from one piece of high ground to another slightly lower.) The visible remains of the great aqueducts, the thousand arches which led Claudius' aqueduct into Rome, the imposing Pont du Gard near Nîmes, the two-tiered structure at Segovia (which still carries part of the city's water supply), give the impression that aqueducts ran largely above ground. In fact whenever possible they were run underground to protect the purity of the water and its possible contamination by enemies. The Aqua Marcia only ran above ground for 11 of its 92 kilometres and the water which crossed the Pont du Gard then ran underground for the next 50 kilometres. Aqueducts needed

constant supervision if water was not to leak out, and in imperial times a task force of slaves was kept by the emperors specifically to keep them in repair. (See A. Trevor Hodge, *Roman Aqueducts and Water Supply*, 2nd edition, London, 2002.)

The typical aqueduct, if running overground, coursed along an arched foundation. The arch was not a Roman invention. It is used in the mudbrick buildings of the east. The Greeks preferred rectilinear designs and so shunned the arch but, by the fourth century, even they were prepared to use it for city gates. These gates are found in central Italy from the early third century BC onwards and the arch then becomes part of the Roman builders' repertoire. The Romans understood that a stone arch can bear much greater stress than a stone lintel and so greater spans are possible. One particularly powerful manifestation of it is the triumphal arch, erected by emperors to commemorate their victories. The first of these arches dates from the reign of Augustus (with the earliest example actually to survive at Rimini in Italy erected in 27 BC). Tiberius erected a particularly elaborate arch with three openings and a mass of decoration, at Orange in southern France in AD 26, after he had suppressed a Gallic rebellion. In Rome the emperor Titus erected an arch (in concrete, faced with Pentelic marble) to celebrate his conquest of Jerusalem. Another elaborate example in Rome is the arch of the emperor Septimius Severus (built in AD 203). The form of the triumphal arch became a symbol of Roman imperialism which spread throughout the empire but which was adopted with particular enthusiasm in the eastern and north African provinces.

The transformation of cities such as Rome was helped by the development of a strengthened form of concrete, which used local volcanic ash (known now as *pozzolana*) mixed with lime as mortar. The combination was first used in the late republic but it took two generations of trial and error before the best kind of lime was isolated and the right mix was perfected. One of the qualities of volcanic ash, as compared to the sands used in earlier Etruscan and Roman concretes, for instance, was that it produced a mortar that would set under water and so could be used as the base for bridges and harbour works. To create a standing wall the mortar was mixed with stone. A typical method was to lay a course of stones boxed in with planks. The mortar would then be poured in and when it was dry a new layer of stones added and so on. The finished rough wall was then faced with patterned stone. In the larger buildings the content of stone fill would be lightened as the building rose.

The new concrete provided the possibility of a totally different approach to architecture, one in which the encapsulation of space, rather than just the construction of a structural mass, became possible. It was the emperors who alone had the resources to develop this possibility to the full in a succession of great public buildings that now began to fill Rome.

The concept of a dome may have been inspired by the tent canopies of Achaemenid Persia but there are early Roman examples in the bath complexes at Baia in the Bay of Naples that date from the first century BC. A more sophisticated approach can be seen in Rome in the Domus Aurea, the 'Golden House', built by Nero as a palace for himself after the burning of Rome. The style was that of an opulent seaside villa of the type well known along the coast of Campania but here transported into the

centre of the city. What was revolutionary about its design was one room, the central chamber of the east wing, where a dome was raised from an octagonal base. Radiating out from the central chamber were a series of vaulted rooms. The whole was lit by a circular opening in the dome and by windows placed high in the walls of the surrounding rooms. This was a truly revolutionary way of using space and light.

This initiative was developed in the palace the emperor Domitian built for himself at the end of the first century AD, the ruins of which still stand on the Palatine Hill in Rome. Like Nero, Domitian was seeking a setting in which to display his autocracy. The *Domus Augustana* was a grand building with two majestic façades, one overlooking the Circus Maximus, the racetrack, the other the Forum. The site was an awkward one and vast foundations had to be laid before the building could rise on two different levels. Its grand public rooms, in particular the *Aula Regia* where the emperor displayed himself on ceremonial occasions, could not have been constructed without concrete. This vast room (possibly 30 metres across) was roofed in timber but the adjoining basilica had a concrete vault that spanned over 14 metres. The whole was an elaborate interplay of vaults, domes, and half-domes, still set, however, within a traditional rectangular exterior.

In Trajan's reign the plunder of Dacia provided the opportunity for another massive building programme in Rome. Trajan decided to benefit the city directly with a huge complex including a forum and library as well as a market hall. In the forum and library, Trajan stuck to traditional forms and they were built on levelled ground at the foot of the Esquiline and Capitoline Hills. Trajan's column, faced with the great scroll of the events of his Dacian campaigns that winds round it, was built to a height of 40 metres as a marker of how much the ground had been lowered. The market area had to be built behind, within the cuttings of the hillside, and this required considerable imagination and expertise. Trajan's architect, an easterner, Apollodorus of Damascus, created a masterpiece of design that exploited the difficult site to create a complex that still exists on three different levels each with its terrace and entrance from the surrounding slopes. (Although traditionally seen as a commercial centre, even a shopping mall, in truth its exact function is not known.) Again this would have been impossible without concrete, but here it is used in the service of the community in a set of buildings which are elegant but which, unlike the Forum and its accompanying buildings below, have no pretensions to grandeur.

With Hadrian comes the culmination of these developments. Like Trajan, Hadrian was sensitive to the Roman past and when he built a temple to Trajan in Rome he followed traditional models. Likewise the Mausoleum he built for himself by the Tiber (now the Castel San Angelo) was modelled on that built by Augustus. With the Pantheon, the temple to all the gods, however, he exploited to the full the confidence with which Roman builders now used concrete. It was erected on the site of an earlier temple built by Augustus' colleague, Agrippa, and Hadrian modestly preserved Agrippa's name at the top of the columned façade. The Pantheon appears simple in design, no more than a drum roofed with a huge dome, the world's largest until modern times, over 43 metres in diameter. The problem was how to support the vast weight of this dome.

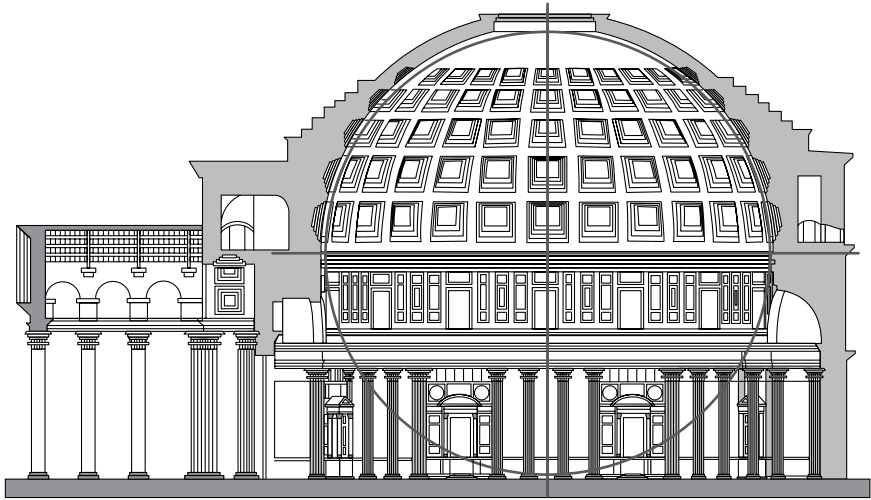


FIG. 10 The Pantheon. Roman engineers constructed a solid circular foundation some 15 ft deep and then superimposed a wall on it which rose in three sections with a diameter of 142 ft. Exactly half this distance up, they built a huge wooden frame and the concrete dome was put up layer by layer over it. By narrowing the width of the dome as it rose, the weight was kept manageable. Further weight was saved by carving out coffers, which may originally have been decorated with rosettes as was the case in other buildings of the period. For centuries this was the largest unreinforced concrete dome in the world. The proportions are so harmonious because the distance from the floor to the centre of the oculus, the 'eye' in the centre of the dome, is exactly the same as the building's diameter. The interior contains, in fact, a perfect sphere.

It was done by lightening the type of stone used as the structure went higher and narrowing the masonry skin so that while 6 metres thick at the foundation it is only 150 centimetres thick around the opening at the top of the dome. Recesses carved inside the completed dome lightened the load still further. The sophistication of the builders was such that the semicircle of the dome can be continued as a full circle whose circumference touches the centre of the floor. As originally designed the portico would have been much higher, but the task of transporting 100-tonne columns, as each would have been, from Egypt to Rome seems to have defeated the builders and they had to settle for 50-tonne examples. (Unlike the Greeks with their columns made up of drums, the Romans preferred the monumentality of a single piece of marble.) The whole building (mercifully saved by transformation into a Christian church in the seventh century) stands today as the supreme achievement of Roman architecture.

Hadrian is also remembered for the complex of buildings which make up his villa at Tivoli (built between AD 118 and 134). It is the largest villa known from the Roman world and, like the English country house of the eighteenth century, set in landscaped surroundings. The whole is an extravaganza of the new tastes in architecture and the skills needed to realize them. Domes, vaults, and almost every form of curved surface are used in the succession of buildings, which are set alongside pools, fountains, or cascades of water. Some echo buildings Hadrian had seen in the east, a stoa from Athens, the temple to Aphrodite (the Roman Venus) at Cnidus, for instance, while along the galleries and colonnades were set copies of antique statues. The villa is a public display of the emperor as connoisseur. (See the extensive discussion in William MacDonald and John Pinto, *Hadrian's Villa and its Legacy*, London and New Haven, 1995.)

Among Trajan's many benefactions to Rome was a vast bath complex. There had been earlier baths in Rome (both Nero and Titus had built some for the city) but Trajan's set a pattern that was to become copied through the empire. The centre of the baths was the *frigidarium*, a cold room, which now, through the use of concrete, could become vaulted and vast. From the *frigidarium* the bather would proceed to smaller rooms where the water was warm or hot (the *tepidarium* and the *caldarium*). There was much more to bathing than this. The Romans incorporated the concept of the Greek gymnasium into the bath complex so that, typically, there were *palaestrae*, exercise areas, on either side of the *frigidarium* and libraries, galleries, and even shops. The Roman could satisfy not only his or her physical requirements, but also his social, intellectual, and sexual needs (from the many prostitutes who frequented the baths). In the first century AD there was no prohibition on women bathing at the same time as men, although those women who particularly valued their reputation normally patronized separate establishments. There were, inevitably, scandals, and Hadrian eventually had to decree the segregation of the sexes. In the large city baths it now became the custom to institute separate bathing times for men and women, the men being allocated the hottest time of all, the afternoons.

The imperial baths built in Rome in the later empire are the most monumental of all. The baths of Caracalla (built AD 212–16) covered 2 hectares and were set in an enclosure of 20 hectares. They could accommodate 1,500 bathers, the water being provided by cisterns in the rear of the complex that could hold 18 million litres, enough to keep a constant flow of cold water into the *frigidarium*. (The warm and hot baths were refilled at intervals and 10 tonnes of wood a day was consumed in fifty furnaces to heat the water.) The baths of Diocletian (built AD 298–306: the short time-span an indication of the efficiency of the whole building operation) were even larger. Their great central hall was later converted by Michelangelo into the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli and survives today, its eight vast supporting pillars still faced in the original Egyptian marble. The central hall baths of Maxentius, begun in AD 307 and completed by Constantine, rose to a height of 35 metres above ground level. There was no better way to make the ordinary citizen of Rome feel he was part of a proud empire, and baths became part of Romanization throughout the provinces. In the west, where they were an innovation, great baths are found at Timgad and Leptis Magna in north

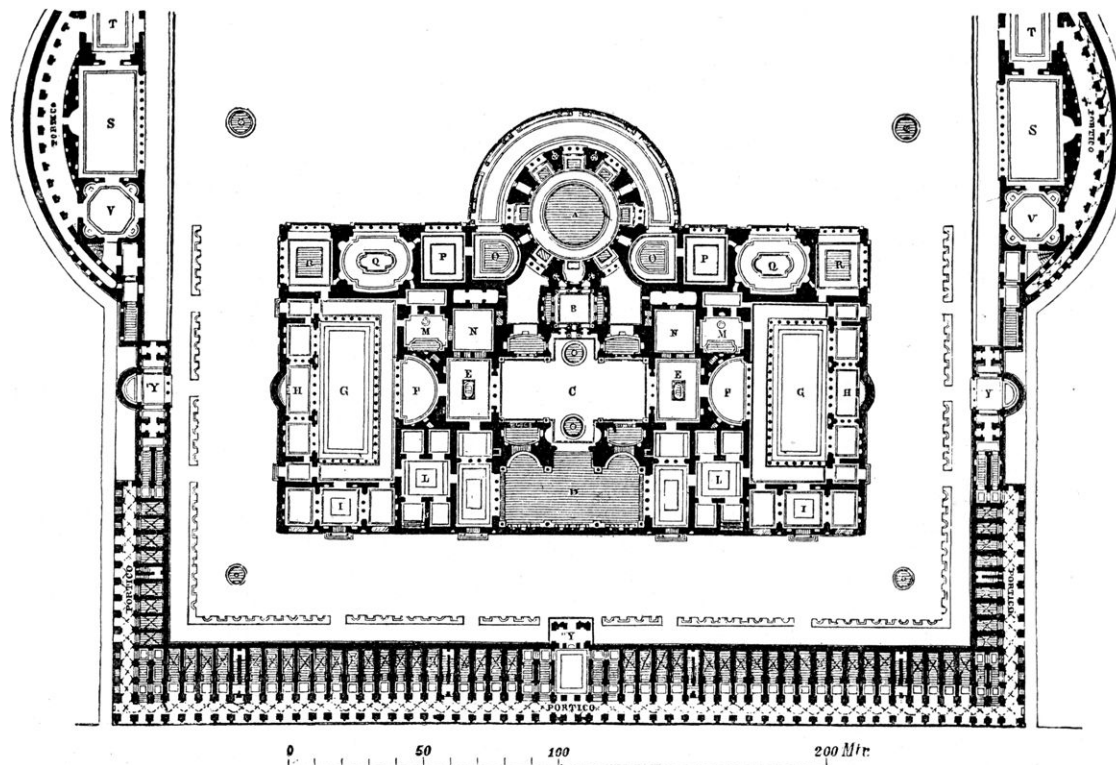


FIG. 11 The Baths of Caracalla, begun by this emperor but only completed in the 220s, show the grandeur of the third century imperial projects. Huge and lavishly decorated with marble and statuary, the Baths could hold 1,500 bathers at a time. In the central complex, the natatio was a large swimming pool from which one could progress to the central (cold) frigidarium and then to the circular (hot) caldarium. Glass panels added natural heat to that already provided by massive boilers. One either side of these central rooms were palaestrae, exercise grounds, and halls. The Farnese Bull (see p.670) dominated the centre of one of the palaestrae. The surrounding enclosure included a majestic entrance from the Aventine and a library. The baths were finally abandoned in the sixth century.

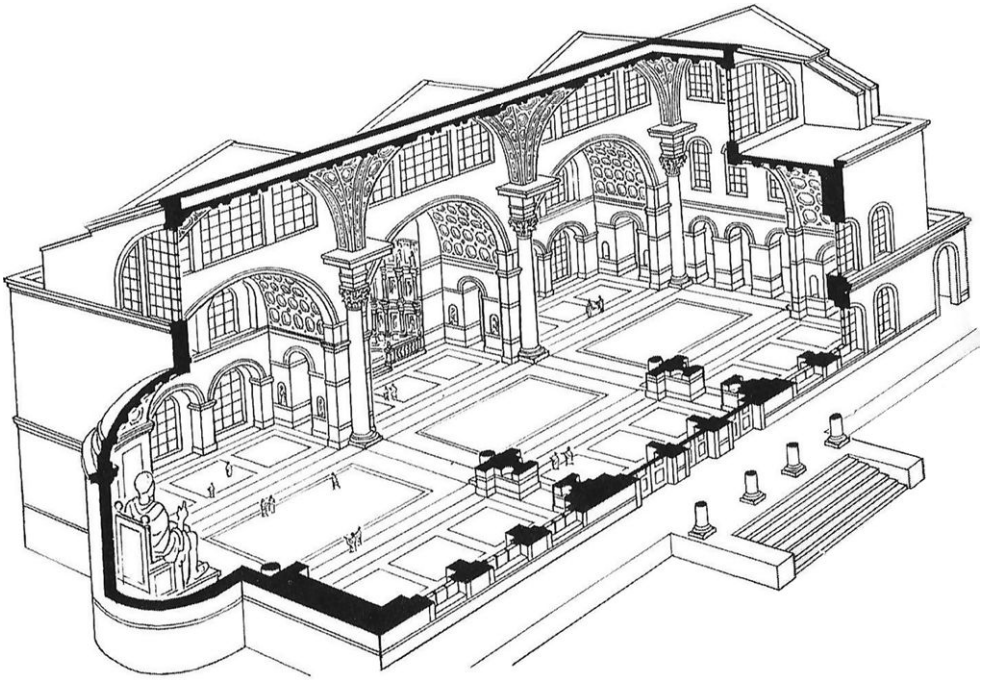


FIG. 12 This vast basilica (here in a cutaway reconstruction) was begun by Maxentius before his defeat in AD 312 by Constantine who completed it. Entrance from the Via Sacra in the Forum was up a wide set of steps graced by four massive porphyry columns. Once through these the visitor would have been overwhelmed by the vaults and rich marble floors. The seated statue of Constantine, whose remains survive in the Capitoline Museum, was placed in a niche at the northern end. The basilica's vaults were brought down by an earthquake in AD 847.

Africa, at Trier, near the Rhine border, and at Aquae Sulis, the modern Bath, in Britain where the local hot springs fed the bathing pools.

Perhaps the Romans will not be remembered as much for the beauty of their architecture as for the confidence with which they handled their materials and the sheer monumentality of their creations. This had its legacy. When the empire became Christian the basilica became the most popular of the designs for churches, while Justinian's great church of St Sophia in Constantinople has been seen by some as inspired by the Pantheon and the Baths of Maxentius. When the Venetian architect Piranesi created his prints of real or imagined Roman buildings in the late eighteenth century, he scandalized some by his insistence that Roman architecture was more inventive than Greek, but inspired others so that one finds the dome and the arch reappearing in early nineteenth-century architecture as far afield as Washington. Even into the twentieth century the Roman architectural legacy has persisted, in creations such as the war memorial at Thiepval, France, and the great booking hall of Pennsylvania Station, New York, which drew on the triumphal arch and the bath house respectively.

In his *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Edward Gibbon lamented the intellectual life of the Greeks in the second century AD: ‘the name of Poet was almost forgotten, that of Orator usurped by the sophists [he uses the word in a derogatory sense, see earlier, p. 270] ... a cloud of critics, of compilers, of commentators darkened the face of learning and the decline of genius was soon followed by the corruption of taste.’ This dismissive attitude has long since been overturned by a new appreciation of Greek culture in this period.

The Romans regarded the defeated Greeks with some ambivalence. Cicero, for instance, governor of Cilicia, certainly enjoyed buying Greek statues and exploring Greek philosophy but he wrote to his younger brother Quintus, just appointed governor of Asia, that the Greeks of his day were not worthy of those of fifth-century Greece; they were ‘deceptive, inconstant, and schooled by long servitude to ingratiating ways’. He admitted to putting on a false show of friendliness simply to keep relationships smooth. Provincial governors were often abusive to their subjects. Flaccus, the governor of Asia, raised special taxes to create a fleet to protect his province against pirates but it was never built. He collected taxes from Jews but never forwarded them to Jerusalem. Protests to Rome were dismissed by Flaccus’ supporters there. No wonder the Greeks hesitated to embrace Roman rule.

It took some time for this mutual distrust to dissolve. Stable administration by Augustus helped restore confidence but far-seeing Greek cities, among them Aphrodisias (see Interlude 8), saw the advantage of winning Roman support and patronage. When Tiberius wished to build a new temple to the imperial cult in the province of Asia, eleven cities competed to be its home, each one stressing its loyalty to Rome. (Smyrna won.) The visits of Nero to Greece, though ludicrous in the emperor’s attempts to compete in Greek festivals, may have had some positive impact. It took an enthusiast such as Hadrian to cement the relationship between emperors and Greece. In 124 Hadrian was initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries and a year later he launched a major building programme in Athens. He finished the vast temple to Olympian Zeus begun by Peisistratus in the sixth century BC. He donated a magnificent library that was graced with a hundred columns of Phrygian marble. A new aqueduct brought water into Athens from Mount Parnes. Then when the temple to Zeus was ready for dedication Hadrian inaugurated a new festival, the Panhellenion. Cities with an ancient Greek heritage, most of them from the mainland, met every four years within the sanctuary of the temple and participated in

games modelled on those of Olympia. For the first time in this period Greeks were among those achieving consular rank.

The peoples of the Near East used a mass of languages. Aramaic was widespread but its dialects were so distinctive that they could count as separate languages, Syriac in Osrhoene (modern south-eastern Turkey), Palmyrene at Palmyra on the far eastern border of the empire, and Nabataean for the Nabataeans. The Jews spoke in Hebrew and Aramaic. The Egyptians used demotic Egyptian, and, from the second century, Coptic appears. Lycian had died out as a written language by 300 BC although Phrygian survived along the northern coast of modern Turkey. It was written down in Greek script. Greek gradually became more pervasive. After the conquests of Alexander it was the language of the conquerors and administration. The Jews who had dispersed during the diaspora were translating their Hebrew scriptures into Greek by the end of the third century BC. When the Nabataeans (see earlier, p. 488) were still a client kingdom of Rome, they posted their inscriptions in both Nabataean and Greek. By the time they were formally made a province of the Roman empire in AD 106 they used only Greek while retaining Nabataean for their rituals. By this period anyone with an ambition to succeed had to be able to speak and write Greek. Evidence from Egyptian school texts show that Homer and other Greek writers were on the curriculum. The word *koinē* ('common') is used to describe the everyday Greek that emerged in these centuries. *Koinē* was the language of the historian Polybius and of the Gospels and the letters of Paul. It was also the language of Hellenistic science. (See J. N. Adams, Mark Janse, and Simon Swain, *Bilingualism in Ancient Society*, Oxford, 2010, for a full survey of this fascinating area.)

The Second Sophistic

Yet during the first century AD a Greek elite began to withdraw themselves from *koinē* and to advocate a return to Attic, the language of fifth- and fourth-century Athens. The impetus was a revived pride in being Greek. These intellectuals were happy to call themselves sophists (see earlier, p. 270). One of their members, Philostratus (c. AD 170–250), entitled his survey of second-century AD Greek culture *Lives of the Sophists*, and coined the term 'the Second Sophistic' to designate the era. The movement set itself the task of purging Greek of Latin words that had crept into *koinē* but this was not an anti-Roman movement. Many of the sophists were Roman citizens and were well aware that ultimately their survival as an elite depended on Roman power. They formed the meeting point between the formidable literary and philosophical heritage of the Greeks and the wealthy Roman elite who admired this heritage and were happy to patronize it.

The movement was also a reassertion of elite identity against the growing number of provincials who were learning Greek for the first time. The search was for *pai-deia*, the Greek term for the educated man's way of being in terms of a shared education, attitudes, and mannered relationships with others. The fourth-century

orator Libanius talked of the young man with *paideia* as one ‘who has installed Demosthenes in his soul [in other words, mastered classical rhetoric]... He will think it is his duty to make the cities happy; he will rejoice when the executioner’s sword lies idle; he will make the citadels beautiful with buildings; and he will remain throughout as servant of the Muses.’ In short he will be a sophisticated if somewhat elitist patrician.

An intriguing example of one who leapfrogged from a Semitic background straight into the sophistic movement is Lucian. Lucian was born in Samosata in Syria about 120 AD and describes himself as a ‘barbarian,’ ‘wearing a kaftan in the Assyrian style’ as he puts it in another context, and so outside Greek culture. Somehow he managed to learn rhetoric in the approved Attic manner and even travelled west where he was well received in Gaul and reported that he became rich there. Lucian was endlessly inventive. He could hardly make any statement without turning it on its head a sentence or two later. The great sixteenth-century scholar Erasmus, renowned for his satires on Catholicism, loved him. ‘He shows amazing artistry and finesse in his wide-ranging criticism, turning up his nose at the whole world, rubbing the salt of his wit into every pore and always ready with a nasty crack on any topic that crosses his path.’ Yet Erasmus also appreciated an underlying seriousness in Lucian’s writings—he could ‘mix gravity with his nonsense and nonsense with his gravity’. Simon Goldhill, in an excellent essay on Lucian in his *Who Needs Greek?* (Cambridge, 2002), notes that he was as likely to be found in a prostitute’s bedroom as on the fringe of the emperor’s court.

Lucian was sensitive to his ‘Assyrian’ background and how much it needed to be subsumed. Achieving *paideia* was not merely a matter of absorbing the great classical texts. If one was a philosopher there was a correct way of walking, with a masculine gait and an appropriate air of seriousness. Lucian recalls his acute embarrassment when he used the wrong word of greeting when visiting a patron. Some of the onlookers assumed he must be drunk but, in fact, his social gaffe came from ignorance. Further embarrassment came when a ‘philosopher’, presumably Lucian himself, attended his first Roman dinner party, ate the dishes in the wrong order, and did not know the correct way of replying to a toast. In an imagined text in which a Scythian visiting Athens discusses philosophy with Solon, Lucian tells how the Scythian sweats in the heat, while true Greeks, who have trained in the *gymnasia*, are so fit they remain cool. ‘Becoming a Greek’ was challenging for the outsider.

With the Greek elite distancing themselves from the speakers of *koine* through the use of Attic, new boundaries have to be negotiated between the two ‘languages’. To those born in the elite the distinction between acceptable Attic speech and *koine* was easily understood but to an outsider such as Lucian it was not and so he is able to offer an original perspective on the issues that arise. In Attic ‘tt’ is often used in place of the *koine* ‘ss’ and Lucian presents an imagined law case where *sigma* (‘s’) protests that *tau* (‘t’) has trespassed on her territory. In another text he ridicules a speaker who has become so obsessed with using Attic that his arcane language and stilted expressions have made him incomprehensible. A doctor has to be called to

make him vomit up his lists of words. Somehow, Lucian suggests, one had to learn to speak Attic Greek naturally and without display. However inadequate Lucian felt in his own time, in later centuries his own Greek became a model for students.

Paideia demands serious intellectual study and Lucian mocks those who collect hundreds of texts, and who may even have read some of them, but who are unable to analyse them critically. He could hardly have criticized Plutarch (AD 46–120) in this respect. Plutarch was a wealthy native of the city of Chaeronea in Boeotia and he spent most of his life there and at Delphi where he was a priest. However, he studied in Athens and also lectured in Rome. He appears to have been completely at ease with the new balance of power, accepting Rome as the ruler of Greece, while insisting that Greece remained the more sophisticated of the two cultures. In his *Political Precepts* he advises his fellow members of the elite to acquiesce in the dominance of Rome (and deliberately cultivate patrons in the capital itself) while never abasing themselves before their rulers. He knew the Roman mentality well enough to know that self-abasement would only encourage contempt.

In his *Lives*, which have been drawn on earlier in this book, Plutarch compares celebrated Romans with selected Greek equivalents (the orator Demosthenes is compared to Cicero, for instance, and Nicias, who led the ill-fated Sicilian expedition, with Crassus, who suffered a similar disaster in Persia). Plutarch did not consider that the Romans had become properly educated (in other words absorbed Greek culture) until the third century BC and it was only from then that he could give them respect. Many of his Greek heroes, Pericles, Alcibiades, Lysander, are, understandably, from the earlier classical period while he covers many of the famous Romans of the republic. His real interest is in the characters of individuals, and the moral attributes of each of his subjects matter more to him than whether they were Greek or Roman. In short his sympathies range beyond the confines of his native Greek culture. Plutarch is, of course, writing several centuries after the lives of many of his subjects, but his style is so immediate and his creation of atmosphere so haunting that his evocations of past lives are convincing. His eye for detail is exact and he is adept at creating the drama of a death scene, the murder of Cicero or the suicide of Cato of Utica or Antony and Cleopatra.

One of the most celebrated of Plutarch's works is his *Table Talk*. Here an erudite group of Greeks and Romans, Plutarch among them, recline at a *symposium* and discuss a series of intellectual issues. They are more than simply philosophers: at least one had been a consul, another the governor of Achaia, and the dedicatee of *Table Talk*, Sossius Senecio, is an intimate of the emperor Trajan. The discussions are unhurried and open-ended and they show off the atmosphere of the Second Sophistic as much as the *paideia* of the participants. The subjects are a wonderful mix: 'Why the middle of wine, the top of oil, and the bottom of honey is best', 'Why women are hardly, old men easily, foxed', 'Which was the first, the bird or the egg?', 'What God is worshipped by the Jews', and, intriguingly, 'Why women do not eat the middle part of lettuce'. One suspects that Plutarch selected and shaped the discussions so as to show off his own breadth of interests.

One of the absorbing features of *Table Talk* is the versatility of the debate: scientific explanations for natural phenomena mingle with mythical ones, the literature of the past can be quoted and pleasure taken in the absurdity of some of the questions. Medicine, music, and mathematics are among the themes. The genre is known as a ‘miscellany’, a mixture of themes with different backdrops that could be reshuffled so as to be read in any order. Pliny’s *Natural History* is another example of this genre and it became especially popular in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. (See F. Klotz and K. Oikonomopoulou (eds.), *The Philosopher’s Banquet: Plutarch’s Table Talk in the Intellectual Culture of the Roman Empire*, Oxford, 2011, for a fuller discussion, especially, on the subject of ‘miscellanies’, the essay by Teresa Morgan.)

Once the seeker of *paideia* had made an intensive study of the classical authors, Sophocles, Thucydides, Xenophon, and Plato among them, he would progress to the mastering of rhetoric. The fourth-century Athenian orators Demosthenes and Isocrates (see earlier, pp. 294–5, 312) were the inspirations here. While there were far fewer opportunities for debate in the second century than in classical Athens, there were still many occasions when public speaking was valued. Crucial was the need to represent one’s city before others, either to the emperor, the provincial governor, or in disputes with neighbours. Any dignitary arriving at a city had to be welcomed with appropriate oratory. Formal speeches were to be made at funerals and weddings and in honour of the gods and the city when games were held. Yet perhaps the greatest incentive was to achieve status among one’s peers by mastering the correct language, effective forms of presenting an argument, and the invention of fresh ways of expounding a traditional theme. It was common, for instance, to show off one’s knowledge of the history of classical Athens but the trick was to present the narrative in an original way.

One can explore the use of public oratory in the orations of Dio of Prusa, a city in the province in Bithynia. Dio, also known as Dio Chrysostom, ‘the Golden-Mouthed’, c. AD 40–120, grew up in a wealthy family and had the finest of Greek educations. Like many ambitious provincials he made for Rome but was among those banished from the city and banned from his native Prusa during the increasingly despotic rule of Domitian. For some years he ‘dropped out’ and, with ‘the appearance and dress of a vagabond’ as he put it, wandered around the empire gaining respect for his wisdom.

In the more tolerant reigns of Nerva and Trajan, Dio came back to prominence. Trajan in particular admired him and Dio delivered a series of orations on kingship, at least two of which were delivered personally before the emperor. While Dio accepts that monarchy is the best form of government, he recognizes that it can degenerate into tyranny (as he knew only too well) and that provincial governors can behave badly. The urbane Trajan would hardly have been offended by this but it seems too that Dio was playing to a Greek audience who were always sensitive to the abuse of Roman power. Dio’s ideal, imbued with Stoicism, is of a natural harmony overseen by Zeus as father of the gods and men. One of his speeches was made before Pheidias’ statue of Zeus at Olympia.

However, Dio's hopes of harmony proved wishful thinking. When he returned to his native Prusa he found tensions both between and within the cities of Asia Minor. He concluded that the Stoic cycle (see earlier, p. 352) had entered a period of decline. As a philosopher Dio took it upon himself to offer advice to others. One of his orations is to the citizens of Tarsus, the capital of the province of Cilicia (and the birthplace of the apostle Paul). Tarsus had fallen out with all its neighbours while internally it was riven with class conflict. The city also had a reputation for making unnecessary complaints to Rome about its governors. Dio is sharply critical of the Tarsian elite for looking only after themselves. They do not allow the poor, in this case a union (*collegium*) of linen workers, to share in the franchise. While they have a right to criticize governors if they really have behaved badly, there is no point, he tells them, in getting a reputation for being litigious. Nor will their Roman overlords be impressed with their petty disputes with their neighbours, even 'over an ass's shadow' as Dio puts it. Dio is equally frank with the cities of Nicaea and Nicomedia, in his own province of Bithynia, who were squabbling over precedence. Dio has been accorded citizenship of both cities (this was a common practice, citizenship was often awarded to honour a famous orator or poet, anyone who had helped the city, or in the hope of gaining benefactions from the wealthy) and this gave him the right to address their citizens. 'What's in a title?' is his response. These disputes are, he went on, nothing compared to the great issues over which the cities of classical Greece differed and, again, if the best is to be got out of Roman rule, the cities need to be united and so act as an effective restraint on unscrupulous governors.

It is not surprising that Dio was so widely thought of. Here, a hundred years after his death, is the *encomium* of Philostratus:

In speaking Dio had a peculiar resonance of his own, which enhanced the oratory of Demosthenes and Plato just as the bridge [of a stringed instrument] enhances the tone of musical instruments; and it was combined with a serious and direct simplicity of expression... Though he very often rebuked licentious cities, he did not show himself acrimonious or ungracious, but like one who restrains an unruly horse with the bridle rather than the whip. (*Lives of the Sophists*.)

It is a model which might still be followed today among online debaters.

The Cities of Pisidia and the Greek East

The settings for these declamations were the cities themselves. Their backgrounds were varied as can be seen by surveying those of one region, Pisidia, set within the Taurus mountains, the range that runs between the southern coast of modern Turkey and the Anatolian plain. Pisidia was incorporated into the Roman province of Galatia in 25 BC. Among its cities was the ancient settlement of Termessos. The origins of Termessos are lost but it was well enough established to be mentioned in the *Iliad*, there as founded by the Solymys, an otherwise obscure Anatolian tribe. Its position is magnificent, high up on precipitous rocks overlooking the narrow valley

pass that it controlled. Alexander the Great came this way in 333, forced the pass, and hoped to take the city, but even he had to accept that it was impregnable. Even today it is a long climb up to the city's defensive walls, an impressive feat of engineering in themselves.

The citizens of Termessos exploited their independence and chose their allies carefully. Attalus II of Pergamum awarded the city a stoa for its support and then, when Termessos sided with the Romans against Mithridates, the Roman senate granted it independent status (71 BC). So throughout the Roman period Termessos remained self-governing, issuing coins to proclaim the fact. Typically for such cities a core of buildings from the Hellenistic era was transformed during the centuries of Roman prosperity. Hadrian awarded the city the right to hold a musical festival and there is a gateway attributed to his patronage. A new second-century road, 'King Street', led up to the city from below and continued into the centre. The Hellenistic theatre, which has wonderful views over the mountains, was rebuilt in Roman style while the stoa of Attalus was matched by one donated by Osbaras, a wealthy citizen. The foundations of several temples from the Roman period survive. As cisterns and the remains of an aqueduct show, Termessos was dependent on a constant supply of water and the city appears to have withered when an earthquake brought down the aqueduct in the fifth century.

Thwarted by his failure to take Termessos, Alexander vented his anger on Sagalassos, the next city to the north. He captured and sacked it. Yet the city soon recovered. Even though Sagalassos is 1,500 metres above sea level on rugged ground it overlooks a fertile plain. In the Roman period it began to flourish after a new road, the Via Sebaste, was constructed through its territory in 6 BC. It could now export grain, fruit, and fine tableware made from the clay of the region. So the city remained loyal to Rome. It acquired its first Roman citizens in the first century AD and its aristocrats were soon contributing new monuments in honour of the emperors. By the beginning of the second century AD it was the leading city of the region. Since Sagalassos was well inland and protected by its elevated position, its prosperity continued well into the fourth and fifth century. It benefited from the military activity of the third century as its grain fed the Roman fleets based on the coast. Earthquakes and plague in the sixth century finally brought the city down. The theatre, high on the mountainside, remains rent by the force of a quake.

Sagalassos is now being meticulously excavated by the University of Louvain (Belgium) and is a pleasure to visit, especially as reconstructions of the monuments in the agoras are now taking place. The city flaunted its prominent position on the mountainside. A massive temple to the emperors Hadrian and Antoninus Pius on a promontory to the south of the city could be seen from far off. The Roman visitor would enter the city along a colonnaded street of the first century AD that was level only because a major crevice had been filled in before construction. First, a lower agora would be reached through a gateway. Here on one side the visitor would find a temple to Apollo, probably built as early as the reign of Augustus, on the other a massive bath house enlarged with a third storey in the late second century. The head of an enormous statue to Hadrian has been recently found in the ruins. The

agora was backed by a beautiful *nymphaeum*, from the period of Trajan, and steps around it led up, past a food market and after another fine Hadrianic *nymphaeum*, to the sumptuous upper agora. This was laid out in the reign of Augustus and was backed again by another *nymphaeum* from the second century AD, now restored and flowing again with water. Statues to leading citizens and monuments to the emperors made this a ceremonial centre. Perhaps the finest building is a *heroön*, a monument dedicated to, in this case, an unknown 'hero', dating also from the age of Augustus, that has an exquisite frieze of fourteen dancing girls. Among the other fine buildings of the city is a library given by a local citizen in 120 AD and now again restored so that the interior can be visited.

The Via Sebaste that ran through Sagalassos' territory continued northwards to Antioch-in-Pisidia. As its name suggests, this was a Seleucid foundation, one of many cities that Seleucus I named in memory of his father Antiochus in the third century BC. Seleucus had fought a successful campaign against the Galatian Celts but he feared that they would expand southwards into Pisidia and then to the coast. So Antioch-in-Pisidia was part of a defensive strategy and Seleucus moved settlers in from the city of Magnesia on the Meander river in the west to populate it. The Romans too grasped its strategic importance and Augustus designated it a Roman colony, Colonia Caesarea Antiochia, with veterans granted land there. Latin rather than Greek then became its dominant language and the memory of Augustus was perpetuated through the posting of a copy of the *Res Gestae*, in Latin only, fragments of which have been found. There was also a Jewish community in the city and its synagogue was visited by the apostle Paul who had made his way up from Perge on the coast (Acts 13: 14). The city prospered, acquired the full panoply of Graeco-Roman buildings, and eventually became the leading city in the south of the province. When Diocletian reorganized the provinces of the empire in AD 295, Antioch-in-Pisidia became the capital of the new province of Pisidia. Its decline seems to be related to the faltering of the trade routes in the late empire—it was simply too isolated to survive.

So it is clear, simply by taking three examples from one region, how varied was the nature of the cities of the Greek east. There was essentially a patchwork of communities, vying with each other for status, often exploiting any contact they had with the emperor or governor to exalt it, and beautifying themselves against their rivals. The benefactors of the city gave (in what is known as euergetism, 'the doing of good deeds') a mass of elegant buildings; in return they were honoured by the city. 'It seemed best to the Council and the people to crown Diodorus with a gold crown and to construct for him a portico in the new gymnasium in which a marble statue of him is to be erected', runs one decree.

The moment to show off came with the festivals and games each city hoped to hold, depending again on a wealthy citizen to finance them. The city would be on display, hold magnificent processions on the ancient model of the Panathenaea, and flaunt its stadium and other public buildings. The participation of each group, the members of a priesthood or an association of craftsmen, was often linked to the provision of a bull for sacrifice so that there would be enough meat for everyone to

feast, a crucial component of any celebration. At Oenoanda in Lycia, one Gaius Julius Demosthenes held a festival in his own honour. Each official or group of officials and the priests of the cults of the emperor and Zeus was ordered to provide a bull. The local villages were grouped together and asked to provide two. Delegations to these festivals from neighbouring cities, ranked according to status, would come to be overawed by the grandeur of the occasion or to jeer at any mishaps.

Ptolemy and Galen

This remained an age of intellectual achievement and some of its major figures were able to break away from their native cities and achieve independent research of the highest order. Among the most significant is Claudius Ptolemy, who worked in Alexandria between 127 and 141. Ptolemy's background is unknown. The name 'Ptolemy', originally royal, of course, had become quite common among Greeks in Egypt by this time but 'Claudius' suggests Roman citizenship, possibly granted to his family by the emperor himself. Ptolemy was certainly born in Egypt but whether as a native of Alexandria or another Greek city is unknown. He was a polymath, known to have written on music, mathematics (proposing new geometrical theorems), and optics (the earliest treatise on refraction), although his greatest work was in astronomy and geography, in both of which he was a giant.

In astronomy Ptolemy had access to data from Babylon and he was much indebted to Hipparchus (see earlier, p. 350) but he added his own observations to take the subject to new peaks. He was eventually able to list 1,022 stars in 48 constellations. His findings were brought together in his *Syntaxis*, later known by the Arabs as the *Almagest*. The *Syntaxis* begins by listing the arguments for an earth-centred universe and then goes on to develop the earlier explanations of the movements of the planets. Although, like his predecessors, Ptolemy worked with a geocentric model of the universe, he went beyond this in positing another point, the equant, around which the circles which each planet followed revolved, and through this he was able to account for even more observed phenomena. The *Almagest* marked a radical break with what had gone before, not least because it broke up the apparent harmony of earlier observations. The work was, in the words of Geoffrey Lloyd, 'extraordinary for the rigour of its mathematical arguments, for the range of ideas encompassed and the comprehensiveness of the results proposed'.

In his *Geography* Ptolemy introduced minutes and seconds into degrees, insisted on the continual rechecking of observations, and tackled the perennial problem of how to represent the globe on a flat surface. Just as in astronomy Ptolemy relied on Hipparchus, in geography he drew heavily on the works of a near-contemporary, Marinus of Tyre, who plotted places according to regular lines of longitude and latitude and so deserves an accolade as the father of mathematical geography. Even while correcting Marinus, Ptolemy is happy to acknowledge Marinus' achievement, but the subsequent adulation of Ptolemy in the Islamic world meant that Marinus' texts and his maps (which were reputed to be the first to show China) were not recopied.

In fact, Ptolemy's enormous status and his adoption by the medieval west, through translations from the Arabic, was not always healthy. His astronomy became frozen into the medieval curriculum and it was only when his hypothesis of an earth-centred universe was challenged by Copernicus and his geography by explorations in the sixteenth century that progress in these fields could be resumed. Ptolemy's lasting influence in the world of the natural sciences came from defining astronomy through mathematical models—'this must be counted as one of the most significant of all events in the entire history of Western science' (John David North).

Galen (AD 129–c.200) was born in Pergamum and was given an extensive education in the major Greek philosophers by his ambitious father before he turned to medicine. (Among his earliest experiences as a doctor was the patching up of wounded gladiators.) After study in a number of Greek cities, including Alexandria, Galen sought his fortune in Rome, and spent most of the rest of his life there until his death. His education left him with an unbridled self-confidence in his intellectual abilities. He was polemical by nature and his extensive critiques of his rivals are often the only record we have of their now vanished works.

Galen was a prolific writer and self-publicist. The range of his medical work alone is staggering: something like 20,000 pages survive, covering every aspect of human health. There are extensive commentaries on his predecessors (though sadly all those on Aristotle are lost), and the main reason why Hippocrates was so highly regarded by later generations is that Galen showed immense respect for the works attributed to him. However, Galen ranged far more widely than this. He was truly one of the finest minds of the Second Sophistic. He was acutely aware that Hellenistic science owed its terms and approach to *koine* Greek and so he was determined to preserve *koine* as a means of expressing himself while also acknowledging Attic as a pure 'elite' language for anyone who wanted to assert status. His thoughts on this, his study of etymologies of words, and his search for precision in their use, make him an important figure in linguistics even if he was typically elitist. 'Greek is the most pleasant language...and the most fitting for humans. If you observe the words used by other peoples in their language, you will see that some closely resemble the wailing of pigs, others the sound of frogs, others the call of the woodpecker.' He was fascinated by the organization of knowledge. Recent work is emphasizing his importance as a logician. 'Galen', to quote Geoffrey Lloyd again, 'is probably unique among practising physicians in any age or culture for his professionalism as a logician...conversely he is also remarkable among practising logicians for his ability in, and experience of, medical practice.'

Galen was the supreme exponent of dissection and loved showing off his skills. 'His vivisections fused the intellectual competition of Second Sophistic performance with the violent manipulation of bodies characteristic of Roman spectacle' (Maud Gleason). One could say that his public displays were a form of rhetoric. Even though, unlike his Alexandrian predecessors (see p. 530 above), he was forced to rely on animals for his experiments, he refuted the traditional view that the arteries hold air. He did not grasp the principle of circulation—he had the blood

passing through invisible pores. Nevertheless, he was able to distinguish some of the functions of the liver, heart, and brain and to observe contractions of the stomach in digestion and the peristalsis of the alimentary canal. He carried out experiments on spinal cords to try and pinpoint the relationship between parts of the cord and specific motor functions of an animal. He certainly deserves the title of founding father of experimental physiology.

The discovery of a new text by Galen, *Peri Alupesias*, 'On the Avoidance of Grief', in 2005 by a French student working in a monastery in Thessalonika, has brought us an account of a fire in Rome that will appall any bibliophile. It took place at the end of winter in 192 and swept across the Palatine Hill destroying the imperial libraries there as well as the library in the Temple of Peace in the Forum. Among the losses were many texts from Galen's own library that he had deposited for safe-keeping while he was out of Rome. He especially mourned the loss of medical recipes of which he had no copies but in the other libraries there were other important texts, including some of Aristotle and Theophrastus and the Stoic philosopher Chrysippus that may have been the only copies. As a comment, Galen also lets us know that the papyri in the library of Tiberius had already been made unreadable through the damp that has stuck them together. It is a vivid insight into the sheer abundance of libraries in Rome and the vulnerability of their codices and papyrus rolls to damp and fire.

Galen refused to be dogmatic about matters for which he could find no physical or logical evidence. 'Whether the universe is uncreated or created, or whether there is something outside it or not, I say that I don't know' (from *On My Own Opinions*). It was impossible to discover the origins of the earth and the question was therefore not worth serious consideration. Yet Christians accepted that Galen had enough belief in a single creative force for his ideas to be reconciled with theirs and his works were incorporated into medieval medical practice (from a text of his collected works compiled about AD 500). However, his innovative experimental approach and his rigid application of logic was forgotten as he became the major authority whose works were followed slavishly. Again, as with Ptolemy, it was only during the Renaissance that renewed observations of the human body queried the accuracy of his findings and even then he remained influential among physicians into the nineteenth century. Then he was surpassed, his works overlooked, and it is only now that he is being recognized as one of the finest minds of antiquity. The vast quantity of his surviving works is slowly being translated and admiration for his achievement continues to grow. (See the essays in R. J. Hankinson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Galen*, Cambridge, 2008, and C. Gill, T. Whitmarsh, and John Wilkins (eds.), *Galen and the World of Knowledge: Greek Culture in the Roman World*, Cambridge, 2009. The recent biography by Susan Mattern, *The Prince of Medicine, Galen in the Roman Empire*, Oxford and New York, 2013, has received excellent reviews.)

The equilibrium between Rome and the provinces, between the emperor and the senate and the provincial elites, was very delicate. Above all, it depended on peace. The empire was, in fact, exceptionally vulnerable to war and invasion. The defences along its extended borders were not designed to withstand major attacks, while roads ran from them towards cities whose riches lay unprotected by walls. Its armies were by now accustomed to fixed bases and would take some time to deploy, especially if they had to be moved large distances. The subjects of the empire had enjoyed relatively low levels of taxation for decades and the resources needed to meet a challenge could not be easily raised at short notice. (As an excellent survey of these troubled years see David Potter, *The Empire at Bay, AD 180–395*, London and New York, 2004.)

Threats to the Empire

Trouble was now building up from two sources. First there were the tribes of northern Europe. The Romans gave the name German to the wide variety of peoples who occupied the area from the Rhine and Danube valleys to the North Sea and the Baltic and as far east as the river Vistula. The Romans had long accepted that the Germans could not be incorporated into the empire. Experience had shown that their heavily wooded lands were impossible to conquer. Instead a variety of relationships had been built up. Many of them were peaceful, trading and diplomatic relationships underwritten with Roman subsidies. On occasions there was conflict but shrewd emperors realized the importance of playing the tribes off against each other rather than risking direct confrontation. As a result many Germans had adopted aspects of Roman culture and in some activities, metalworking, for instance, were as adept as the Romans. The Germans lacked an efficient centralized system of administration, but in certain respects their standard of living may not have been far below that of many parts of the empire. Romanization was not confined to the empire.

However, during the second and third centuries there were important changes taking place in the societies of northern and eastern Europe, although these are still impossible to define clearly. The difficulty lies in relating Roman sources that talk of large, relatively well-organized tribes assaulting the empire and the arch-

aeological evidence that, insofar as it can give a coherent interpretation, suggests a much wider range of interactions on both sides of the border, many of which may not have involved any destruction. There seems to have been steady population growth together with the emergence of new, often expansionist, tribal groups. In the Black Sea area the Goths appear in the middle of the third century. Traditionally they have been seen as a single people with origins in Scandinavia but more recent research suggests that they were an amalgam of various migratory peoples, eastern German tribes, and the original settlers of the Black Sea region. The term never described an ethnic grouping but rather those whom Gothic leaders managed to forge into a fighting force. (This should be borne in mind when the term is used later in this book: the distinct tribal groups that gave their allegiance to Gothic leaders probably shifted with time.) They gathered their resources around the Black Sea and eventually were strong enough to threaten Asia Minor and the Balkans. In south-east Europe they came into conflict with the Sarmatians, nomadic peoples of Asian origin, who had established themselves on the Hungarian plain. The Sarmatians in their turn were pushed towards the Roman frontier.

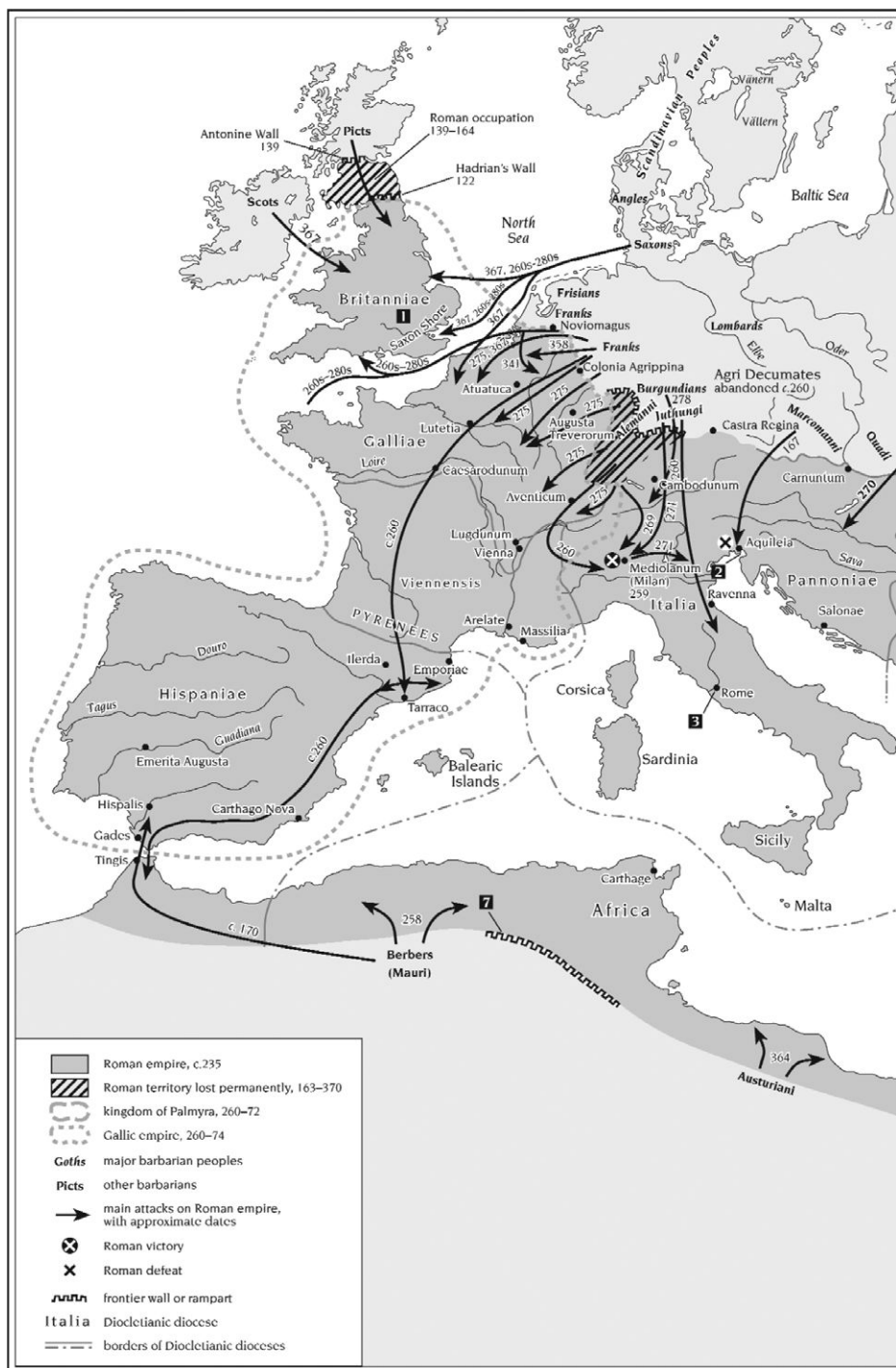
This period also sees the emergence of new Germanic cultures further north. One of them, the so-called Przeworsk culture that appeared in the late second century between the Vistula and Oder rivers, stands out because of its rich warrior burials. Another is the so-called Oksywie culture on the lower Vistula. These cultures were more highly militarized than was usual with the German tribes (for whom warfare was typically low level and seasonal) and it has been suggested that they were organized around the capture and trading of slaves. Although the evidence is still controversial there is some that indicates these cultures were expansionist. The Wielbark culture replaced the Oksywie and moved from the Baltic coast towards what is now the Ukraine. Archaeological evidence suggests that a new tribe, the Burgundians, emerged on the Elbe to the west of the Vistula about the same time as the homeland of the Oksywie/Wielbark cultures became deserted. Similarly another German tribe, the Vandals, may have been the successors of the people of the Przeworsk culture. All these attempts to link peoples to defined cultures need to be taken with great caution: allegiances to tribal chiefs shifted easily, and groups of warriors broke up and reformed often without leaving archaeological traces.

The emergence and expansion of these peoples put the German tribes along the Roman frontier under increasing pressure. One result was to force the smaller scattered peoples into larger tribal units. The process probably began in the early third century. The central German tribes were drawn together as a confederation known as the Alamanni ('all men'), first attested in 213. The Franks emerged slightly later along the lower Rhine while the Saxons appear along the coast of the North Sea. The Germans also seem to have become more sophisticated fighters, probably as a result of service in the Roman armies. They had originally used short slashing swords that would not have been effective against Roman infantry. Now they were using long two-edged swords or rapiers that could penetrate armour more easily.

There is also evidence of skilled bowmen armed with weighted arrows, again an effective weapon against armoured troops. For the first time the Germans could face the Romans with some confidence, and as pressures built up on them from the north the riches and lands of the empire became more tempting. By the middle of the third century the Romans were vulnerable along the whole northern border from Saxons, Franks, Alamanni, Sarmatians, Goths, and other smaller tribes. Their raids were often small scale with the limited objective of obtaining plunder but they were bound to be frightening (which is why the Roman sources may have exaggerated them) and if left unchecked might lead to the gradual dislocation of the empire.

The strategic problems involved in meeting the threat were considerable. The border was so extended it could not be effectively guarded along its whole length. So long as the pressures from the north and north-east and the ceaseless regrouping of peoples beyond the borders continued, even a major victory over the German tribes could not bring a lasting peace. The Romans were to try a variety of policies from straightforward military confrontation to making treaties with individual tribes or buying them off with payments of cash. Garrisons were sometimes stationed over the border in German territory so that trouble could be snuffed out before it reached the empire, while on other occasions invaders were allowed to settle within the empire in the hope that they would defend their land against any future incomers (as well as providing troops for the Roman armies). None of these policies provided a permanent solution.

It was unlucky that the empire also faced a fresh threat from the east. Campaigns by the Romans against the Parthians in the 160s and 190s were relatively successful but this was partly because the Parthian empire was in decay. It was under threat from the Kushan empire in the east and it also faced internal disintegration because of its policy of relying on independent local leaders who were allowed their own armies and control of their own finances. In the early third century the last of the Parthian kings, Artabanus V, was overthrown by one Ardashir, king of a tiny state in the southern province of Persis, the birthplace of the Achaemenid empire (see p. 104). Ardashir proclaimed himself to be heir of Achaemenids (though his dynasty took the name Sasanian after Sasan, a king from whom Ardashir claimed descent) and he was crowned in the tradition of Darius and Xerxes as King of Kings at Ctesiphon, on the Tigris, in 226. The Sasanian state was fervently nationalist, purged Persia of foreign influences, including those lingering from the Greeks, and revived the traditional religion of Zoroaster. Ardashir was succeeded by the formidable Shapur I (AD 240–70), the most accomplished campaigner the Romans had had to face for centuries. (Hannibal is the closest equivalent.) Shapur's many victories over the Romans lay in his close study of the legions and their conservative tactics, an ability to move troops fast and to use sophisticated methods of siege warfare. He extended his empire into Armenia and Georgia and there was some talk, perhaps again exaggerated by the threatened Roman population, of his ambition to win back the traditional boundaries of the Achaemenid empire beyond the Bosphorus.



MAP 15 Invaders of the Roman Empire, AD 170–370

INVASERS OF THE EMPIRE (AD 170–370)

- 1** In the late 3rd century a chain of forts built on the east and south coasts of Britain was organized into an anti-piracy command, later known as the Saxon Shore.
- 2** After the Marcomanni attacked Aquileia in 167, the northern frontier was constantly threatened.
- 3** The importance of Rome declined in the 3rd and 4th centuries as it was abandoned by the emperor in favor of bases closer to the troubled frontiers.
- 4** Dacia could not be defended, and c.272 Aurelian abandoned it to the Goths and the Gepids.

- 5** Constantine the Great chose the small town of Byzantium as the site of a new capital for the empire.
- 6** After the emperor Julian was killed at Phrygia in 363 his army bought its freedom by ceding eastern Mesopotamia.
- 7** A network of ramparts, ditches, military roads and forts was built in the 3rd century to defend Rome's African border.



Marcus Aurelius

Until the middle of the third century the empire managed to defend itself with some success. When Antoninus Pius died in 161 the succession was smooth. Marcus Aurelius, the nephew and son-in-law of the emperor, and his adoptive brother, Lucius Verus, had been selected as successors by Hadrian and they had had the advantage of having been groomed for their roles. (Marcus Aurelius' correspondence with his tutor, Fronto, survives.) However, while Marcus Aurelius had learned the conventions of court life, he had never been given any military command and at first he relied heavily on Verus, who appeared to have the dash needed for military action. Marcus Aurelius' confidence was misplaced. When the Parthians invaded in 161, Verus was dispatched to the east to deal with them but he only managed to beat them off with difficulty. When the war was finally over in 166, the returning troops brought plague back into the empire and meanwhile a variety of German tribes, the Chatti, Marcomanni, and Quadi among them, had taken advantage of the weakened northern frontier to raid into the empire.

Verus died in 169 while on the northern frontier. Despite his inexperience Marcus Aurelius now took on the challenge of defending the empire in person and for most of his reign he was campaigning along the Danube borders. The invaders travelled deep into the empire. One German raid reached into northern Italy, another as far as the ancient shrine of Eleusis near Athens. Marcus Aurelius struck back with some success but in 175 a false report of his death encouraged an easterner, Avidius Cassius, to declare himself emperor and Marcus had to abandon the frontiers to deal with him, losing the advantage he had won. Luckily Cassius was murdered and Marcus Aurelius regained the initiative. When he died in 180 not only were the borders intact but there were Roman forces stationed in the territory of two of the major tribes, the Marcomanni and the Quadi. The empire had done more than merely defend itself. A major column, originally over 50 metres high, was erected in Rome after Marcus Aurelius' death to commemorate the campaigns. The reliefs are not as fine as those on Trajan's column but they provide a clear picture of the brutalities and triumphs of war. (The column, now crowned with a statue of the apostle Paul, stands in today's Piazza Colonna.)

Something of Marcus Aurelius' personality survives in his *Meditations*, random jottings put down in Greek, and never intended for publication, which he made while on campaign. They are grouped in twelve books compiled between 172 and 180 and, even though they are suffused with conventional Stoic philosophy, they show a man preoccupied with his own thoughts, seemingly hardly affected by external events. The *Meditations* have evoked a mixed response from later generations. Many readers find them cloying and sentimental and are depressed by the pervading sense of melancholy and preoccupation with death. Others are attracted by the sensitivity Marcus Aurelius shows for the unity of life around him ('For all things are in a way woven together and all are because of this dear to one another') and by his attempts to live as a good man in an evil world, taking the initiative in acting with kindness

and dignity whatever the response of others. To the senatorial class he was the perfect emperor, and it is particularly appropriate that one of the few great bronze statues of the Roman world that survives is that of him on horseback. (It was saved because later generations thought it was of the Christian emperor Constantine. Pollution has now taken its toll and the wonderfully restored original is permanently under cover, with a copy having taken its place in Piazza del Campidoglio on the Capitoline Hill where it had stood since the sixteenth century.)

Marcus Aurelius had made his son Commodus co-emperor three years before he died. In this he was reasserting the traditional desire of emperors to set in place a dynasty. However, the appointment was, said Marcus Aurelius' admirers, the only failure of his life. Commodus was, according to the historian Dio Cassius, an eyewitness of events as a senator between the 180s and 229, 'a greater curse to the Romans than any pestilence or crime'. (Sadly Dio's careful account of these years is now known only through Byzantine summaries.) Commodus abandoned the idea of extending Roman rule over the frontiers, made peace, and returned to Rome. He was much condemned for this although in fact the peace held (thanks to resolute local governors and a policy of settling Germans on land in return for military service). Handsome and athletic, he then devoted himself to pleasure. Favourites took over power and an atmosphere of intrigue pervaded the court. The carefully cultivated aura of family piety encouraged by Antoninus was shattered. In its place Commodus attempted to create an image of himself as a divine emperor. He portrayed himself as Hercules, not in the guise adopted by Trajan, as a hero labouring on earth for humanity, but as a god who had already completed his labours and who stood alongside Jupiter. It aroused little support, and without allies in the army, the senate, or even within his family, he was acutely vulnerable. He was assassinated in 192.

Septimius Severus

The assassination had taken place within Rome and the immediate successor was none other than the Pertinax who had had such an impressive career under Marcus Aurelius (see earlier, p. 514) and who must have carried some of the fading aura of that reign with him. Pertinax was now 66. His advanced age suggested that he would provide no more than a breathing space, as Nerva had done earlier in AD 98, but he was still energetic and for three months he struggled to rein in extravagance and corruption. The vested interests of the Praetorian Guard and Commodus' bloated household proved too much for him and he too was murdered after only three months as emperor. His proclaimed successor was one Julianus but he was greeted by a popular revolt (with the crowd making their point by pouring into the Circus Maximus and occupying the seats reserved for senators) and so there was a power vacuum at the core of government. Though Julianus remained nominally the emperor, the way was open for a coup d'état in the provinces by anyone who could gain the support of the legions.

The governor of Pannonia Superior on the Danube, Septimius Severus, an African from Leptis Magna, proved the man. His own legions always provided the centre of his support but he soon had those of the Rhine and his native Africa behind him. A possible rival, the governor of Britain, Albinus, was temporarily bought off by offering him the title of Caesar with the implication that he would be Severus' successor. Severus now marched on Rome and the senate, in a manner reminiscent of the year 69, jettisoned Julianus, who was also murdered. Severus was greeted in magnificent style, flattered the senate, tricked the Praetorian Guard into surrendering its arms, and replaced it with one drawn from his own legions. From here on the Praetorian Guard was to be handpicked by the emperor (and even travelled on campaigns with him). Severus was now able to proclaim himself the legitimate successor of Pertinax, under whom he had served in Syria some ten years earlier, and Pertinax was granted divine honours in an elaborately staged 'funeral' (with a body in wax) in the Forum.

Severus, like Pertinax, was a provincial who had worked his way upwards through a series of commands in different parts of the empire, never losing his Punic accent during his ascent. His political and military skills were considerable and he combined energy with opportunism. However, what he had done could be done by any resolute commander, and the governor of Syria, Pescennius Niger, also chanced his luck and declared himself emperor. Legions loyal to Severus marched east and defeated and killed Pescennius in 194 close to the battlefield of Issus, scene of one of Alexander's victories. Severus then moved from Rome to take over command, persuading Pescennius' legions to join his own, and then moved further east to add further territory on the border of Parthia to the empire. This new campaign was only interrupted when Albinus, who had discovered that he had been duped when Septimius designated his own son as successor, proclaimed himself emperor and crossed to Gaul. He was defeated and killed outside Lugdunum (Lyon) and Severus then strengthened his position in the west through the sacking of cities and mass confiscations of land.

Severus knew the importance of mixing ruthlessness with lavish generosity. The people of Rome were flattered by donations and a hugely extravagant display of games, *Ludi Saeculares*, in the tradition of Augustus (see p. 452 above). A great triumphal arch dedicated in 203 is one of only three in Rome to remain largely intact. Coins show that Severus' statue was placed in a triumphal chariot drawn by no less than six horses (rather than the customary imperial four), with, as a sign of his dynastic ambitions, his sons, Antoninus and Geta, beside them. Antoninus (better known as Caracalla, from the Celtic hooded cloak he wore) had already been made co-emperor in 198 when only 9. However, the 'provincial' Severus was never at ease with the senators but he hardly needed to be now that their political impotence had been exposed.

In fact, Severus' interests lay elsewhere. He showed that the empire had not lost its vigour when led with determination. In 197 he was back campaigning against the Parthians and plundered some of the great cities of their empire, Seleucia, Babylon, and the Parthian capital Ctesiphon. Although the campaign then faltered, Severus

added two more provinces to the empire in northern Mesopotamia and Roman rule now stretched as far as the Tigris. In 207 news arrived of another revolt, this time in the far west of the empire, among the northern tribes of Britain. Severus was ailing but he travelled north with his sons Caracalla and Geta and while Geta oversaw Britain (and was then appointed as co-emperor with his father and brother), Caracalla accompanied his father in what was a meticulously planned campaign to subdue, and, when they resisted, exterminate, the Scottish tribes north of Hadrian's Wall. The archaeological remains of the Roman camps, notably one at Carpow on the river Tay, suggest that the Roman occupation was planned to be provisioned by sea.

Severus died in York in 211. The Scottish campaign was scaled back as his sons hurriedly returned back to Rome to consolidate their position. Severus had shown what ruthlessness and incisive leadership could achieve in defending the empire. His reign marked important shifts in the balance of power. While Marcus Aurelius had included the senate in his official announcements, Severus did not. Most of his advisers were easterners. With the importance of Rome fading, provincials were preferred to Italians and soldiers to civilians. Many cities, especially those who had supported Severus against Pescennius Niger in the east, were given the title of *coloniae* as a mark of the emperors' special favour and this raised their status within their province. With the Praetorian Guard now part of the emperor's permanent entourage, the Praetorian Prefect became an important official, gradually absorbing administrative and legal powers in addition to his military role. He was to prove a key figure when an emperor died. The army was given a pay rise and soldiers allowed to make legitimate marriages. Promotion from the ranks became easier. Severus' alleged last words to his sons, 'Stick together, pay the soldiers, and despise the rest', have the ring of truth about them.

So this was certainly a more militarized empire, even if nothing has been done to reform the inflexible structure of the legions. However, by his defeat of the Parthians, Severus added to its long-term problems. The emperor Trajan had, like Severus, enlarged the empire by annexing the buffer states between Rome and Persia, but his successor Hadrian had been politically astute enough to restore their independence. This time the new Roman frontier was left exposed and vulnerable to the aggressive Sasanians. The urge to show off his military prowess had blinded Severus to the political consequences of his campaign.

Severus' patronage included a massive rebuilding of his native city, Leptis Magna. A grand colonnaded street ran from a new harbour (which silted up almost immediately—the disturbance of the coastline was too great) towards the city centre. When the street reached an earlier, Hadrianic, bath complex, it had to change course and the angle was filled with a magnificent two-storey *nymphaeum*. The street ran up to an enormous new forum that, unlike those of earlier times, was closed in behind arcaded walls. A temple to the Severan dynasty was built against one wall, a basilica opposite it. Sculptors from Aphrodisias (see Interlude 8) were brought in to complete the flamboyant architectural decoration. There was also an impressive new theatre.

Dominating the meeting of the two major streets of the city was another triumphal arch, voted for by the city council but paid for by the emperor. The shell still stands. It is of the type known as *quadrifrons*: four piers enclose four arches in a square so one can ride or walk straight through. The whole was domed and was covered in sculptured friezes showing the emperor, his Syrian wife Julia Domna, and, again, his children already in place as his designated successors, among symbols of Victory. Personifications of Rome and Victory link this African emperor with the imperial capital. The portrayal of the emperor shows an innovation. Severus faces away from the crowds and stares forward at the onlooker. He is carved slightly larger than those around him. Here was the elevation of the emperor as superhuman, one of the first intimations of Byzantine art. Like Commodus, but much more successfully, Severus portrayed himself as a companion of the gods. Often, at crucial moments of his career, he announced that he had seen divine omens, even that the gods had intervened to help him win battles.

Caracalla and the Later Severan Emperors

In his last years Severus had been increasingly concerned with the instability of Caracalla. According to one source he had even considered killing him. Caracalla and the more popular Geta loathed each other, even setting up separate households in the same palace in Rome. In 212 Geta was lured to his mother's apartments, so leaving his bodyguard behind, and then murdered by Caracalla's men. Some 20,000 of his supporters were then massacred. Caracalla claimed that he had struck Geta down in self-defence and launched a series of thanksgivings for his salvation from the fabricated assault to make the point. Geta's name was scratched out from inscriptions (a good example can still be seen on Septimius' arch in Rome where Geta's name has been chiselled out), his portraits obliterated, and coins with his image on them withdrawn. Caracalla's arrogance and brutality are confirmed by an account of a massacre he ordered in Alexandria, apparently on the pretext that the citizens had not shown him proper respect.

Caracalla himself survived until 217 when he was murdered at the behest of his Praetorian Prefect, Macrinus. Although he was not a great commander he had earned some popularity among the soldiers for his readiness to share their hardships while on campaign along the northern borders. The ruins of the vast baths he built in Rome remain (see earlier, pp. 539–40) and his reign is also remembered for the extension of citizenship to all subjects of the empire (except slaves and certain freedmen) through the *constitutio Antoniniana*. The historian Cassius Dio reports, in a hostile account, that his motive may have been no more than to make all liable to the taxes, such as inheritance tax, paid only by citizens, but the edict may rather have been an attempt to create a communal sense of thanksgiving during his frenzied campaign to conceal his murder of his brother.

Severus' dynasty lasted until 235. Macrinus, an equestrian known for his integrity and expertise in the law, reigned briefly after Caracalla's death before the family

regained control in the shape of a nephew who shrewdly took the name Marcus Aurelius Antoninus. The power behind the throne was Julia Domna's sister, the new emperor's grandmother, who claimed that Marcus Aurelius was Caracalla's illegitimate son. He proved to be a devotee of an eastern sun god and is normally known by the title of this god, Elagabalus. The cult became an obsession. Elagabalus decked himself out in Chinese silk and a golden tiara. Stories of his sexual tastes as a passive partner in homosexual activities spread fast. In Rome, traditionalists were embarrassed by this display of 'Persian' luxury and sensuality and were outraged when Elagabalus proclaimed his god 'the father of the gods' in place of Jupiter. The end was inevitable. In 222, Elagabalus' grandmother had him murdered and provided another grandson, Severus Alexander, then only 13, to take his place. The cult was expunged from Rome. That there was still some residual loyalty to the family of Severus is suggested by Alexander's survival for another thirteen years, but an inconclusive campaign against the resurgent Persians and the ravaging of the borders by the Alamanni, saw this loyalty eroded. Severus Alexander was murdered by his troops in 235.

The Crisis of the Mid-Third Century

With the death of Alexander the empire enters one of its most troubled and ill-recorded periods. The literary sources are inadequate, often no more than extracts from vanished histories put together by later Byzantine scholars, and offer little detail of a period of major instability with a pattern of attacks from both the German tribes and the Sasanian Persians over fifty years (234–84). Something can be learned from the study of coin hoards (the assumption being that they were hidden at times of trouble and can be roughly dated by the year of the latest coin), destruction levels, and the building of fortifications or the walls of cities, but the sequence of events is still unclear.

There were at least eighteen emperors in these years who could lay some claim to legitimacy. Their average reign was only two and a half years. It is not difficult to find the reasons for this high turnover. The geographical extent of the attacks on the empire ensured there were several armies campaigning at any one time. Their commanders might chance their luck at seizing power or even proclaim themselves emperor to make themselves more respected as leaders. The armies themselves had every incentive to declare their commanders emperor in the hope that this would give them access to greater plunder. There were also power struggles within the armies between rival commanders and several emperors died at the hands of their own men. Others died fighting invaders.

In fact, the crisis of the third century was as much an internal as an external one. It showed up the inherent vulnerability of the imperial system at a time of military stress. As many resources were used by the emperors fighting rivals as in confronting invading enemies. The determination needed to survive and the priority given to fighting alienated the usurping generals from the leisured senatorial classes

and from the Roman *plebs* who resented resources being diverted to the troops. The toughness and resolution of the emperors are vividly portrayed in their portrait busts. They are among the more impressive achievements of Roman sculpture. As examples one might pinpoint the bust of Philip the Arab (emperor 244–9) in the Vatican Museums or the head of Trajan Decius (emperor 249–51) in the Capitoline Museums in Rome.

Attacks by German tribes were renewed in the 230s but they were relatively small scale and tackled with some ease by the new emperor Maximinus, a rugged outsider from Thrace. The real threat to Maximinus came from Rome where there were still Severan supporters in the senate. They exploited a revolt in Africa against taxation led by a local governor, Gordian, and eventually proclaimed his grandson, also Gordian, as Caesar. Maximinus rushed south to deal with the situation but drove his men so harshly that they mutinied and killed him in 238. The Gordian grandson, though still only a boy, emerged as sole emperor in the same year (as Gordian III).

Inevitably Gordian relied heavily on strong military men of whom the most prominent was an Anatolian, Timesitheus. While raids on the empire continued along the Danube border, more threatening was a series of attacks by the Sasanians on Roman border towns masterminded by the new Sasanian king, Shapur. They provoked a major Roman counter-attack by Gordian in 243. Gordian may have been defeated—he certainly withdrew for some reason to northern Mesopotamia and it was here that his frustrated men murdered him in early 244. The Praetorian Prefect, Philip the Arab, was hastily declared the new emperor and had to hurry back to Rome to secure his position after having paid a large ransom to the Persians. He took Gordian's body to Rome with him, claiming that the young emperor had died of disease and deserved to be deified. This was a major cover-up, not only of the truth behind Gordian's death but of the probable defeat that had led to it.

After Philip had paid out the ransom, glorified his Syrian home city Chahba, now renamed Philippopolis, and flattered Rome by celebrating a thousand years since its foundation, he was short of money. He withdrew subsidies to the northern tribes and this led to uprisings along the Danube. It is now that there are the first rather obscure mentions of a group called the Goths. Once again the unresolved issues of the succession came to the fore. The emperor had to delegate commands but this simply created more power hungry generals. One of these was Decius, from the province of Illyricum on the Danube, who had already had a distinguished career as consul, provincial governor, and prefect of Rome. He was now ordered to suppress a revolt in one of the legions and his success led to him being declared emperor by his troops. Philip, who had little military experience, died confronting him (249).

Decius attempted to enforce some form of uniformity on the empire by requiring that all offer a sacrifice to the 'ancestral gods' of the empire and consume the sacrificial food and drink. This was hardly an onerous demand and most subjects of the empire must have accepted this ritual act without hesitation. Participants seem to have been given considerable leeway in interpreting 'god' or 'gods' in the way they

wished. As there were accurate census lists, participants could be checked out and given a certificate when they had complied. Although there is no evidence that Christians were Decius' target, the campaign left them with a problem of conscience. Some complied in the sacrifices, some bought their certificates, and others openly, even joyfully, refused to sacrifice, in effect leaving them open to persecution (see further pp. 595–7). Despite his experience as an administrator, Decius was never a successful commander and he died, in his turn, in 251 fighting off an invasion of the Goths and others that appears to have penetrated well into the empire. Thousands of trained men may have disappeared with him in poorly recorded defeats.

The immediate effect of Decius' death was confusion. The Persians were rampaging through Syria in 252, possibly with some collaboration from discontented Syrians who were realizing that the empire could no longer give them protection. Even Antioch, one of the great cities of the eastern empire, was sacked. Local communities were beginning to accept that they must defend themselves, either through building fortifications or raising their own troops. The emperor could not be everywhere but there was no effective way of delegating commands without the risk of a challenge from any general winning a victory.

From 253 power at the centre was shared by a new emperor Valerian and his son Gallienus. Valerian was of the old school, a conservative aristocrat from Italy. He was already in his sixties but he was soon on the move. His priority was to stem the advances of the Sasanians, which he did temporarily, but he then headed to the German borders and then back to the east. Gallienus, meanwhile, was sent to keep order on the Rhine.

Valerian was obsessed with the unity of the empire and he issued another edict requiring sacrifices to the gods. Unlike Decius he targeted Christians, especially bishops, many of whom were executed. Yet his own reign ended in disaster in 260 when he was seized during negotiations with Shapur. Shapur humbled the proud Valerian by using him as a footstool from which to mount his horse and he eventually died in captivity. The Sasanian triumph was trumpeted by Shapur in a magnificent series of rock reliefs. The king humiliates his Roman enemies from times past. Gordian is shown being trampled underfoot by Shapur's horse. Philip pleads before the king for his release. Valerian, on foot, is held by his wrist by his conqueror.

The 250s and 260s were a time of almost continual unrest as invasions struck ever deeper within the empire. In 260 the Alamanni reached as far south as Milan (the Roman Mediolanum) before they were defeated by Gallienus. (It was probably now that the importance of Milan and the inadequacy of Rome as a base for the defence of Italy first became apparent.) In 259–60 other German tribes devastated eastern Gaul and made their way down to the Mediterranean. Some bands even penetrated Spain and Mauretania. In 267 the Heruli, a people not recorded on any other occasion—a reminder, in fact, of how transient many of these raiding groups were—took an invasion fleet of 500 ships into Greece and sacked Athens. The great Odeion of Agrippa and the Hellenistic stoas were destroyed and the survivors had to hurriedly construct a new wall for the city from the debris (parts of which can still be seen). Athens never fully recovered from the attack.

Gallienus was a man of enormous energy. Despite the range of attacks he managed to maintain peace in the central part of the empire for some six or seven years in the 260s. He had the good sense to maintain close links with Egypt and north Africa so that there would always be supplies of food. He was also aware of how counter-productive it was to persecute Christians, so freedom of their worship was now respected. One of his military innovations was a specialized cavalry force which, combined with infantry, could be moved more quickly than the legions to deal with emergencies. By now senators had virtually disappeared from commands—talent had to come before birth.

Crucially, Gallienus also understood that the empire might be better defended by dividing the imperial command. The prompt came from one of his commanders on the Rhine frontier, Postumus, who was declared emperor by his troops in 260. Postumus soon found himself in control along the northern frontier, with a ‘capital’ at Trier, and with influence as far south as the Alpine passes. The next step, and that taken traditionally by usurpers, would have been to march towards Italy to challenge Gallienus, but Postumus hesitated. He may have been wanting to consolidate his position in the west before he moved and he did go on to win over the legions of Britain and Spain. However, even then he did not march and he seems to have been happy with a ‘Gallic empire’, which he ran as if it was a Roman state. It is probable that his rule depended not just on the legions but on the support of the local aristocracy, whose main concern would have been the defence of their estates. They may have offered him the taxation he needed to survive on condition he remained there to defend them. In fact Postumus campaigned so successfully against the Germans that between 263 and 271 they gave no more trouble. Although Postumus’ ‘empire’ was an affront to the centralized traditions of the empire, it provided a model to follow. Gallienus, in fact, realized the advantages of the arrangement and left Postumus alone until 265 when he tried unsuccessfully to defeat him. When Gallienus was murdered, his successor Claudius II (268–70) also tolerated Postumus and his successors. The ‘Gallic empire’ survived until 274 when it was reconquered by a later emperor, Aurelian (ruled 270–5).

Another area of the empire to achieve independence during this period was Palmyra. This cosmopolitan trading city on the eastern border of the empire, its ruins still among the most haunting of the empire, had been incorporated into the province of Syria in AD 18 but its ruling families, who depended on trade with the east, had always preserved its separate identity. Its king, Odaenath, successfully harried the Sasanians as they retreated from the campaign of 260 and Gallienus was prepared to allow him to coordinate the defence of the east. Gallienus clearly regarded this as an official appointment, a form of senior governorship within the Roman system, but Odaenath then declared himself ‘King of Kings’, on the Persian model, elevated his son Vaballathus as successor, and held sway over much of Syria, Palestine, and Mesopotamia. Under his redoubtable widow Zenobia, who had probably murdered him in 268, the ‘empire’ annexed Egypt and much of Asia Minor. This was the largest ‘Greek’ kingdom known since the days of the Hellenistic monarchies. Zenobia appears to have seen herself as a new Cleopatra but she fared no better at

the hands of the Romans. When she declared Vaballathus, still a boy, to be an Augustus in 271 the Romans moved to crush her. City after city rallied back to the empire as Zenobia's military weakness was exposed. Palmyra was regained for the empire in 273 although Zenobia survived Aurelian's triumph in Rome and settled down to what appears to have been a respectable life as the wife of a Roman noble to whom she bore children. It is a pity that so little is known of this redoubtable woman.

The Effects of the Crisis

The effects of this continuous unrest are difficult to quantify. That there was, inevitably, some breakdown in the relationship between government and subject can be assessed from the number of rescripts, the answers that emperors made to appeals from their subjects, that have survived: 240 survive from the reign of Caracalla (211–17) and 453 from the reign of Severus Alexander (222–35) when government was still functioning well. In the five years of Philip the Arab's reign (244–9), however, there are only 81 and for the reign of Gallienus (260–8) only 10. For the emperors who ruled between 268 and 275 there are only 8. There are all kinds of reasons why documents may or may not have been preserved but the steady decline in their numbers is surely significant. Subjects felt, perhaps, that the emperor could not be relied on for help.

The economic impact of the crisis is particularly hard to quantify. One response to the increasing costs of war had been the debasement of coinage. Marcus Aurelius had cut the silver content of coins by a quarter and Septimius Severus and Caracalla had reduced it even further. By the reign of Gallienus a typical 'silver' coin only contained 2 per cent silver. In fact, this had less impact than one might think as the face value of the coins remained linked to the gold coins in which senior officials were paid and the silver coins were accepted as tokens of exchange much as coins of little metallic value are today. Even so it paid to hoard coins with higher levels of silver. It was when Aurelian tried to reform the coinage that problems arose (see below, p. 569).

The insecurity of the times can be seen in the building of defensive walls, across the Isthmus at Corinth, in Athens, and in Rome (by the emperor Aurelian), though many smaller cities did not complete theirs until later in the century or beyond. In general, other building in cities is now rare and few dedicatory inscriptions survive. Even a major site such as Olympia has few after 270 although the Games continued. Large cities, filled with imposing buildings, had already become increasingly difficult for their councillors to maintain and the invasions may only have confirmed a faltering in new projects. On the other hand, some cities, Trier, Milan, and Sirius (in the Balkans), gained new importance as centres of defence and administration. In general the cities of the east appear to have been more resilient than those of the west: Antioch was able to survive and flourish despite being plundered twice by the Sasanians.

There were other factors at work. 'Plague', probably smallpox, was first attested in 165 and spread from the eastern army camps throughout the empire. There was

another bad period between 250 and 275 that led to depopulation in the worst affected areas. There are other reports of peasants fleeing from taxation—villages in Egypt are known to have been abandoned. The archaeological evidence from the countryside shows that estates became larger and this suggests that speculators moved in to buy up land. Some of the great fortunes of landowners that are recorded for the fourth century were probably built up this way and so there may have been an important shift from city life to luxurious villas. Agriculture as a whole was not significantly threatened by the upheavals of the century. Pannonia on the upper Danube seems, despite its exposed position, to have benefited from new economic contacts with the east. The construction of villas there continued throughout the century. In less vulnerable areas of the empire prosperity continued. Inland Asia Minor was hardly affected by the unrest and olive production in north Africa increased. Spain also prospered.

Overall, despite the instability at the centre, the empire proved astonishingly resilient, which is why scholars are reluctant to exaggerate the scale of the crisis. No emperor, however proclaimed, attempted to act outside the system. All portrayed themselves on coins that were set in traditional imperial iconography. They used titles hallowed from the past and most called on the favours of the ancient Roman gods. Aurelian effected a great triumph in Rome that echoed those of earlier centuries. Imperial patronage continued. When petitions were made to the emperor, they were expressed in traditional terminology.

One sign of this resilience is, perhaps paradoxically, the appearance of revived or new local cultures. With the establishment of Roman rule local cultures had often been undermined, first by conquest and then through an influx of goods from Italy. As the shock effect of Roman victory wore off, the regions recovered their confidence. In the Celtic parts of the empire divinities such as the equestrian goddess Epona reappear and Roman towns are renamed with Celtic names. In other parts of the empire there are the first literary works in local languages, in Egypt in Coptic (popular Egyptian speech but written in Greek letters) and Syriac, both important media for Christian texts. There are economic revivals. Roman artefacts—pottery, for instance—became produced locally and trade links with Italy declined. The disruptions of the century may have, in fact, encouraged the growth of regional craftsmanship. This new vitality, which reflected a shifting but enduring balance between imperial and local cultures, was, without doubt, a factor strengthening the empire.

The Romans Regain the Initiative

The major political problem of the empire was the readiness of troops first to elevate their commanders to the post of emperor and then dispose of them as quickly if they failed to achieve. Gallienus was killed by his officers in 268. They probably resented his acquiescence in the independence of the Gallic empire and Palmyra. His successor, a cavalry-general, Claudius II, won a great victory over ‘the Goths’

that was to keep peace for decades, but died in 270 of the plague at Sirmium, his Balkan headquarters.

After Claudius' death a series of emperors continued the struggle to resume control of the empire. They were of Balkan stock (the Balkans had become a major source of recruits) and their loyalty to the empire showed how successful it had been in integrating its subject peoples in a common cause. The first of these emperors was Aurelian (270–5), an energetic man and one with a vision of how to restore a fragmented empire. He defeated an invasion by the Alamanni and, as has been noted, finally brought to an end the two independent parts of the empire, the Gallic empire and Palmyra. He also rationalized the boundaries of the empire by withdrawing from Dacia and so re-establishing a frontier along the line of the Danube. He was lucky in that the Persian empire became less aggressive in the aftermath of the death of Shapur. To restore the confidence of the people of Rome, who had become increasingly aware of the vulnerability of their city, Aurelian built a massive wall round it, much of which still stands today. Once the empire was restored he brought back riches plundered from Palmyra to display in a great triumph in Rome with Zenobia and the last of the Gallic emperors, Tetricus, among the prisoners. Less successful was another of Aurelian's initiatives, to issue a new gold coin of fine quality to replace those of previous emperors. It was doubtless a political move to reinforce the idea of a restored empire but the link with the value of silver coins broke down and in some parts of the empire, Egypt, for instance, the result was rampant inflation.

In 275, Aurelian was killed, probably by an aggrieved officer. His troops were furious as he had been much respected. The murderers had to flee and, after several months of political vacuum, an Aurelian supporter, Probus, was appointed emperor. Probus achieved further success against the Germans through a mixture of victories and concessions, among them the recruitment of Germans to his armies. In the hope of recultivating the devastated borderlands of the empire defeated barbarians were settled there. Probus too died at the hands of his troops in 282 and his successor, Carus, who had continued the fight back by launching a successful invasion of Persia, died on campaign only a year later, apparently struck by lightning. Much had been done in these short reigns but there needed to be a period of consolidation if the empire was to regroup its resources for long-term survival.

Carus was the first emperor not to seek formal recognition by the senate (and his successors followed suit). This was a significant moment as the emperors were now freed from any need to leave the frontiers for Rome. Carus had also attempted to strengthen his position by appointing his sons as Caesars, his deputies and successors. The elder, Carinus, was given charge of Italy and the western provinces. The younger, Numerian, accompanied his father on campaign against the Sarmatians and then on the invasion of Persia. When his father died he was declared emperor, but while the army was returning home he was found dead in his litter. The chief suspect was the Praetorian Prefect, Lucius Aper, but he was soon challenged by the commander of the household cavalry, one Diocles.

Diocletian

Diocles' background remains obscure but he may have been born about 243 in the Dalmatian town of Solona near Split. Some stories suggest he was a freed slave or at least the son of one. Whatever his origins his character, like that of the earlier Balkan emperors, was reminiscent of that of the traditional Roman of the republic, self-disciplined, frugal, with a complete, somewhat arrogant, confidence in his abilities. Afer was summoned before the assembled armies at Nicomedia in November 284 and Diocles, after obtaining the support of the troops, stabbed him to death himself. Acclaimed as Augustus, Diocles defeated Carinus six months later and found himself sole emperor. He took the name Diocletian.

The third-century 'crisis' had been tackled with some success, but it was still unresolved when Diocletian came to power and there was no reason to expect he would last any longer than his predecessors. However, he had the good fortune to stay in power for twenty years and he was to establish the empire in a form that was to survive in the west for almost 200 years and in the east for very much longer. Many of his reforms depended on creating a coherent system out of what had been a series of improvisations by earlier emperors, but he did this with immense determination and great organizational flair.

Diocletian's first concern was the succession. Here he may have been influenced by memories of the joint emperorship of Valerian and Gallienus and the example of the Gallic empire and Palmyra. Imperial responsibilities, he realized, were better shared. A fellow Balkan commander, Maximian, was appointed as a joint, but clearly junior, Augustus in 286. It was a remarkable act of faith, Maximian was allowed to set up his own court and even issue rescripts, but the initiative worked and the relationship survived. Maximian's primary target was a troublesome usurper Carausius, who, after he had been given command of coastal defences by Diocletian, successfully seized territory in both Britain and Gaul between 286 and 293. His major asset was his fleet, which Maximian was unable to match. It was only when Diocletian added two more, younger, commanders, Constantius and Galerius, as Caesars that the highly experienced Constantius was able to move north and challenge him. Carausius was killed by his own men.

The Caesars were designated as successors to the Augusti and the Tetrarchy, or 'rule of four', was consolidated through marriage alliances between the four families. (There is a moving statue of the four, each with one hand on another's shoulder, the other on the hilt of his sword, embedded in the wall of St Mark's, Venice, after it had been looted from Constantinople in the Fourth Crusade of 1204.) Although the empire remained a single political entity each was given a sphere of operation. Diocletian commanded in the east, Maximian was now moved to Italy and Africa, while Constantius oversaw Britain and Gaul and Galerius took the Danubian provinces. Four new imperial capitals appeared, Trier near the Rhine, Milan in northern Italy, Sirmium on the Danube border, and Nicomedia in Asia Minor. Rome was

now a backwater so far as the practical needs of the empire were concerned although Diocletian built a vast bath complex there (see p. 539) and provided a senate house in red brick (which still stands) on his only visit to the city. It was little more than a sop to the senators, who had done nothing to sustain him in power.

In the 290s the Tetrarchs achieved between them a succession of victories that quelled the Germans, dealt with a wide range of local insurgents who were taking advantage of the breakdown of order, and, after some setbacks, culminated in 298 with a massive defeat of the Persians by Galerius. The Persians who had never recovered their vitality after the death of Shapur were forced into paying an indemnity and ceding land across the Tigris to the Romans. Any Persian army advancing in the future would be quickly spotted and dealt with. There was to be peace on the eastern frontier for decades to come.

These victories and the absence of civil war meant that resources could be used more effectively in the defence of the empire. The archaeological evidence suggests that a massive programme of building took place along the frontiers involving the construction of much more sophisticated forts and barriers. Walls now had projecting towers and fewer, narrower gateways, with extra forts being used to thicken the line of defence. The well-preserved walls of the 'castle' at Portchester on the southern coast of Britain provide a good example. The walls are over 3 metres thick and 6 metres high with twenty bastions. They were originally surrounded by a double ditch. These were much more substantial fortifications than anything known earlier in the empire.

If the empire was to survive in a strengthened form it was essential that it exploited its tax base more efficiently. When there was a sudden demand for resources it had been met by the requisitioning of local produce in what could only have been a haphazard and deeply resented manner. Diocletian developed a system under which each individual was assessed on the production potential of his land rather than its extent. Each piece of land was given a value in units known as *iuga* from which the tax required could be computed, and this would remain the same over five years after which time another census would take place. For the first time a budget could be planned. From the little evidence that survives, most of it from Syria and Egypt, the more efficient collection led to local unrest. The burden continued to fall on the poor with the rich able to claim a variety of exemptions.

Traditionally the governor of a Roman province had also been its military commander. Diocletian developed a policy, probably initiated earlier in the century, of splitting the civilian and military commands. The number of provinces was doubled and each now had a civil governor and a military leader (*dux*). The aim was probably to allow the civil administration to concentrate on efficient tax collection without the distractions of defence. The system was consolidated at the top in the later reign of Constantine when military commands to the *duces* were transmitted via *magistri militum* (Masters of the Soldiers) and civil instructions via the Praetorian Prefects who now lost their traditional military role. In between the central administration and the provinces was another tier, the dioceses, of which there were twelve, each headed by a vicar. Codes of laws were prepared to help the new

governors and Diocletian began to rely heavily on edicts sent out from the centre. While the new system took some time to settle as governors and local officials learnt their new roles, it was to stay in place until the collapse of the western empire in the fifth century.

While many of the armies' needs were met by supplies in kind, some had to be bought in and the soldiers also received cash payments. So it was essential to stabilize the money supply. In 293 Diocletian did this in characteristic fashion by sweeping away all vestiges of local currencies and replacing the devalued coins by a currency based on pure gold coins of 5.20 grams in weight with pure silver coins for lower denominations. Constantine followed Diocletian by introducing a gold coin lower in weight (4.45 grams), the *solidus*, which was still being used in the Byzantine empire as late as the eleventh century. However, the mass minting of bronze coins continued (largely, it seems to provide the soldiers with spending money) and this meant that the inflation initiated under Aurelian remained rampant. Again it was typical of Diocletian that he should launch an empire-wide campaign to bring it under control.

The Edict of Prices of 301 is a fascinating document. In it are listed the proposed maximum prices for a vast range of goods and the highest wages each type of craftsman and labourer should receive. For a sewer-cleaner this was 25 *denarii* a day, for a top-quality scribe the same amount for every hundred lines of script. A teacher of rhetoric was entitled to charge 250 *denarii* a pupil, an elementary teacher 50 *denarii* a boy. Different grades of wheat, fish, wine, and olive oil all had their prices. A 600-pound camel-load could not cost more than 8 *denarii* a mile to transport, an ass-load 4 *denarii*. Shoes fit for a senator would cost 100 *denarii* a pair, for a patrician 150 *denarii*, while for an equestrian only 70 (so far did traditional marks of status survive). However, such an attempt to control the minutiae of every transaction, especially when there was not true money economy in any case, was bound to fail. A hostile witness, the Christian writer Lactantius, records that goods were simply hoarded and prices soared even higher. Even the threat of death or exile for offenders did not deter the speculators and the Edict soon became a dead letter.

There has been much controversy over how Diocletian organized his army. It had certainly swollen since the second century and may have numbered between 350,000 and 400,000 men. There are records of new legions but some of these may have appeared only because the size of each original legion was reduced. (The legionary forts of the period seem to have held only some 1,000 men as against the traditional 5,000 of a full-strength legion.) This would have allowed the men to have been used more flexibly (and also made it easier to supply them from local resources) but how they were actually deployed is still a mystery. An argument that small forces on the frontier acted as delayers while more mobile forces were rushed up from behind has not been backed by archaeological evidence.

Diocletian sensed that the power of the emperor needed to rest on something more than military might. Earlier emperors had associated themselves with the

gods (Commodus with Hercules, Aurelian with the sun god, for instance). The problem for someone of obscure birth was how to establish the link. As Sabine MacCormack has pointed out in her *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity* (London and Los Angeles, 1981), surviving panegyrics to the emperors suggest that it was their very success that could be used to show that they were the favoured of the gods. (There is an echo here of Pindar and his hymns of praise to successful athletes.) The choice of god was also important, as the fiasco of Elagabalus had shown, and here Diocletian chose shrewdly. He proclaimed himself as none other than the son of Jupiter, while Hercules, whose successful labours had made him the symbol of those who claimed to be labouring to free humanity of its terrors, was associated with Maximian. On Maximian's coins Hercules was often portrayed slaying the many-headed hydra, an appropriate symbol for Rome's many enemies.

The emperor had now become something different. The pretence that he was no more than an elevated magistrate was exploded as ceremonial became more important. Accessibility was renounced in favour of inaccessibility. A later account (the sixth century *On Offices* by John the Cappadocian) talks of Diocletian 'as the first to have placed on his head a jewelled diadem and adorned his dress and feet with gems and so turned to the habits of royalty or, to speak the truth, of tyranny'. Yet Diocletian did not invent the new ceremonial. A famous description of Aurelian meeting a delegation from a German tribe has the emperor dressed in purple sitting on a tribunal surrounded by a crescent of troops, his commanders on horseback and the imperial standards arrayed before him. The scene was carefully set before the Germans were allowed into the emperor's presence. Diocletian also dressed himself in purple and supplicants had to grasp the robe and kiss it before they could be heard.

From now on, the emperor was treated as if he was the personification of virtues such as majesty or serenity (and thus would be addressed as Your Majesty or Serenity). Audience chambers were designed to show off the emperor while court officials made access to him an obstacle course of elaborate ritual. His replies were fed back by officials. It is possible that the Peutinger Map, the only map to survive from the empire, in a copy of 1200, may have been spread out behind Diocletian (or another member of the Tetrarchy) to show the extent of the recovered empire. (See Richard Talbert, *Rome's World: The Peutinger Map Reconsidered*, Cambridge and New York, 2010.) As the identification between emperor and the traditional gods of Rome was consolidated there was increasing suspicion of those who refused to respect traditional rituals, and the last years of Diocletian's reign were marked by persecution of Christians, a persecution carried out with special fervour by Galerius in the east (see further p. 596 below).

In 305 Diocletian abdicated, persuading a reluctant Maximian to do the same. While Diocletian's reforms might have faltered if they had not been consolidated by his successor Constantine, they were substantial. The fourth and fifth centuries were, as a result, not, as they might have been, solely a period of decline but one in which imperial government was reinvigorated and set in new directions. Imperial



MAP 16

DIOCLETIAN'S DIOCESES AND PROVINCES
IN THE EARLY FOURTH CENTURY AD



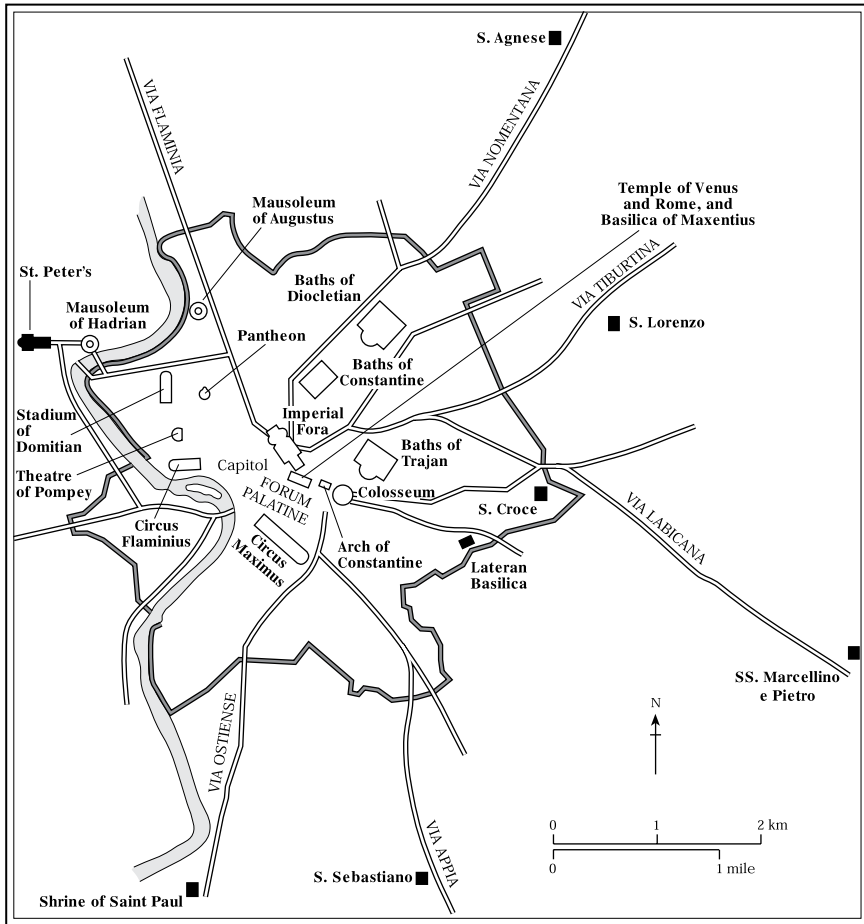
propaganda spoke of ‘the restoration of the whole world’. As Peter Brown has written, ‘Far from being a melancholy epilogue to the classical Roman empire, a fleeting and crudely conceived attempt to shore up a doomed society, the first half of the fourth century witnessed the long-prepared climax of the Roman state.’ For this Diocletian must take much of the credit.

The Emergence of Constantine

When Diocletian and Maximian abdicated Diocletian’s carefully structured system of succession was put into operation with Constantius and Galerius being appointed Augusti and they in their turn naming two new Caesars. However, the system fell apart almost immediately. Constantius died in 306, but, instead of one of the Caesars succeeding him, he had arranged for the troops of Britain and Gaul to acclaim his son Constantine as Caesar. Meanwhile in Rome the son of Maximian, Maxentius, also had himself proclaimed emperor, benefiting from the unrest caused by Diocletian’s implementation of heavier taxation. By 308 there were no less than seven rival emperors contending for power. Diocletian’s hope that the Augusti might appoint their successors on the grounds of ability had already been replaced by a return to dynasticism.

The winner was to be Constantine, an intensely ambitious and determined man with little time for power sharing. He had to create an artificial lineage for himself that took him back beyond his father to Claudius, the great victor over the Goths. None of this would have meant much if he had not been a superb general. By 312 he was in Italy where he defeated the armies sent to meet him and advanced towards Rome, which was defended by Maxentius. The rival contenders for the western empire met at the Milvian Bridge, which ran across the Tiber just north of the city. It was a decisive battle. Maxentius and his men were trapped against the Tiber and forced into headlong retreat across the river where many, Maxentius among them, were crushed to death or drowned.

Constantine now entered Rome as victor and the senators soon voted him a triumphal arch that still stands near the Colosseum. Its decoration is a mixture of styles with much of the material reused from earlier imperial monuments. The reused material seems to have been picked specifically from monuments to ‘good’ emperors, notably Trajan, Hadrian, and Marcus Aurelius, presumably so as to associate Constantine with them. The contrast between these older reliefs and those created specifically for the arch is significant. A panel from an arch of Marcus Aurelius (see earlier, pp. 491–2) shows this emperor in his role as dispenser of justice and largesse, informally surrounded by petitioners. A newly carved panel shows Constantine in the same role but now represented sitting formally and staring to the front with the gathered petitioners carved at only half his size and gazing up at him. It is the pose of Septimius Severus at Leptis taken a stage further. The arch marks the appearance in art of the new imperial ethos, the emperor as demigod, removed from his people.



MAP 17 Rome at the death of Constantine, AD 337. Note how Constantine had added traditional buildings such as a complex of baths, his triumphal arch, the basilica of Maxentius, which he completed, in the historic centre while his churches such as the Lateran Basilica (later St John Lateran) and Santa Croce were placed on the edges of Rome on sites already owned by the imperial family. This suggests Constantine's determination to exercise his Christian patronage without offending pagan traditionalists. Other early churches (St Peter's, San Lorenzo) were built on the burial places of martyrs.

The inscription on Constantine's arch attributes his victory to 'the inspiration of the divinity and the nobility of his own mind'. It appears that the emperor is being associated with a single god as his third-century predecessors, Elagabalus, Aurelian, Diocletian (Jupiter), had been. The senate did not specify which divinity. On the arch Constantine is shown making a sacrifice to the goddess Diana but there is also a representation of the sun god shown alongside his head. In fact, from about 310, the sun god seems to have been Constantine's favoured divinity, perhaps partly

because the cult of *Sol Invictus*, the Unconquered Sun, was especially popular among the Balkan troops and their officers. Constantine was to issue coins with *Sol Invictus* portrayed on them as late as 321.

Yet the most remarkable legacy of the victory at the Milvian Bridge was the vision, or dream—the accounts are confused—that Constantine claimed to have experienced that linked his victory with the support of the god of the Christians. There followed an extraordinary reversal of policy towards Christians. In the so-called ‘Edict of Milan’ of 313, Licinius, Augustus in the east since 308, joined Constantine in proclaiming ‘that no one whatsoever should be denied freedom to devote himself either to the cult of the Christians or to such religion as he deems best suited to himself, so that the highest divinity, to whose worship we pay allegiance with free minds, may grant us in all things his wonted favour and benevolence’. It was a remarkable proclamation and can be interpreted as the culmination of the traditional Roman tolerance of religious cults, now extended even to Christianity. In this sense the Edict of Milan marks a significant turning point in western history. To understand its importance, the earlier history of Christianity itself needs to be explored.

By the time of the Edict of Milan (313) Christianity had survived in an empire that had been at best indifferent to it and at worst actively hostile for nearly 300 years. Its origins, like so many of the religious beliefs that spread into the Graeco-Roman empire after the first century, lay in the east. It focused on the worship of Jesus, a Jew who lived and preached in Galilee, part of Palestine, before being crucified in Jerusalem in the reign of Tiberius. (Jesus, derived from the original Aramaic *Yeshua*, was his given name—Christ, from the Greek *Christos*, the messiah or anointed one, came to be used when his movement spread into the Greek world.)

This is an exciting area of scholarship where conventional approaches and interpretations are likely to be challenged in future years as archaeology and texts are combined to provide a more nuanced picture of Christian growth. In recent years, biblical scholars have become noticeably more relaxed about works that challenge traditional accounts of the ‘inexorable’ rise and ‘triumph’ of Christianity and more ready to accept the undoubted diversity of Christian belief as it was accommodated, or accommodated itself, into different cultural and linguistic niches. Christianity took many different forms as it confronted or compromised with the varied cultures of the Mediterranean. A view, still to be found in some traditional histories, that the spread of Christianity was a smooth, steady, and inevitable process, does not accord with the sources. Congregations flourished in some areas but not in others. Many early communities, known from the letters of Paul, disappear without trace. Nor was persecution persistent. There were persecutions of Christians in the 250s (the emperor Valerian) and early 300s (Diocletian) but a long period of comparative toleration in between. Yet, despite the periods of peace, tensions between different Christian groups were so great in the late third century that the historian Eusebius claimed that God brought about Diocletian’s persecutions as a punishment. (See the opening paragraphs of his *The History of the Church*, Book VIII.)

The Contemporary Evidence

There are few areas of ancient history where dates, interpretations of texts, and the events themselves are so contested as in the study of the first century of Christian history. The sources for Jesus’ life are, like those for most aspects of the ancient world, inadequate. References to Christianity in contemporary non-Christian

sources are very few, just enough to give confirmation that a teacher known as Jesus (not an uncommon name for this period) existed and was crucified on the orders of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judaea, in about AD 30. The earliest Christian texts, six or seven letters of the apostle Paul written twenty to thirty years after the crucifixion, say virtually nothing about the life of Jesus, whom Paul had never met. The four surviving Gospel accounts (the word ‘gospel’ derives in English from the Anglo-Saxon ‘godspell’, the Greek original means ‘good news’), those attributed to Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John, were written some decades later in Greek and none shows any knowledge of the writings of Paul. Mark is dated to possibly soon after 70 (as he seems to be aware of the fall of Jerusalem in that year), Luke and Matthew to about 85, and John between 90 and 100. (It was only in AD 180 that these names were firmly linked to specific Gospels, by Irenaeus, a Christian from Smyrna who became bishop of Lyon. (On Irenaeus, see further below, p. 589.)) Memories of Jesus were transmitted over these early years through word of mouth and written records of his sayings, although the passage of time makes it unlikely that eyewitnesses would have survived who could have given accurate accounts directly to the Gospel writers. The first three Gospels do have a common source albeit developed by the writers in different ways and so are known as the synoptic Gospels, Gospels ‘seen with a single eye’. John is altogether a more sophisticated theological examination of Jesus’ life but it has some historical accuracy in that it records place names around Jerusalem that have recently been confirmed by archaeology.

Jesus spoke Aramaic. Greek was still virtually unknown in his native Galilee and none of his immediate followers came from circles where it would have been spoken at the sophisticated level provided by the New Testament texts. So there is a major problem in understanding what might have been lost or developed by the New Testament authors as they worked on their original Aramaic sources. Moreover the Gospels were written for audiences outside Judaea. Mark was by tradition written in Rome, though modern scholarship prefers Syria. Mark’s knowledge of the geography of Galilee is hazy. Matthew appears to have been written in Antioch, capital of the Roman province of Syria and the city where Christians are first attested by name, while John may have been writing to a community that had fled Jerusalem for Ephesus on the coast of Asia Minor. There is no consensus over where Luke was written and who its intended audience was (it is addressed to a single person, Theophilus).

The Gospels were not intended primarily as biographies or historical accounts and as a narrative of events they should be treated with caution. Their aim was to emphasize the special importance of Jesus so as to distinguish him from the other holy men and cults which pervaded the ancient world. An important preoccupation, therefore, was to establish Jesus’ status. This was done through highlighting stories of a virgin birth, of a ‘Transfiguration’ (the moment when God himself appears to have recognized Jesus’ status), and of his powers as a miracle worker. Jesus’ death and his resurrection are also given special prominence, with a focus on his mission as an innocent man, put to death but triumphing over it in some way so as to proclaim God’s message of salvation. There was also a concern with establishing Jesus as

the longed-for messiah (see below). To do this, stories from his life were probably shaped to correspond with prophecies from the Hebrew scriptures. The first chapters of Matthew, for instance, outline the events of Jesus' birth and early life with constant reference back to earlier prophecies. Matthew may, in fact, have seen Jesus as a leader who aimed to bring redemption to Jews alone but who, like earlier 'prophets', was rejected by them.

The degree to which such needs and pressures shaped the 'facts' presented in the Gospels is the subject of immense scholarly dispute. The trend of recent scholarship has been towards accepting the historical reality of Jesus but placing him more securely within his Jewish background. This background has been put into sharper focus by the growth of understanding of the Jewish world of the first century, particularly as a result of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (see below).

(For further reading, it has to be said that this is an overcrowded field, with many rivalries and divisions between and within Christian, Jewish, and agnostic perspectives. It is very difficult to find a coherent picture. However, Paula Fredriksen's *From Jesus to Christ*, 2nd edition, New Haven and London, 2002, is a scholarly but readable discussion of the issues involved in creating that elusive figure 'the historical Jesus'. Christopher Rowland's *Christian Origins*, 2nd edition, London, 2002, analyses the Jewish background but takes the story on as do the works of Larry Hurtado such as *How on Earth did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus*, Grand Rapids, Mich., 2005. Hurtado argues, against others, for an early acceptance of Jesus as a divine figure.)

The Life of Jesus

Hallowed tradition tells of Jesus being born in Bethlehem, the city of David from whom he claimed inheritance through Joseph, his mother Mary's husband. There is also tradition, narrated in Luke's evocative account, that links his conception to the power of the Holy Spirit, thus making him 'the Son of God'. Yet his family was resident in Galilee, a northern region of Palestine, in the village of Nazareth, a peasant community, and many of his listeners saw Jesus as purely Galilean with no links to Bethlehem (John 7: 41–2). Some scholars argue that the Bethlehem of his birth was in fact a prosperous town of the same name near Nazareth and it was the desire to tie his birth to prophetic passages that explains the transfer to the other Bethlehem. Little is known of Jesus' life before he began preaching at the age of 30. It would have been unusual if he had never married but no mention is made of it in the Gospels and, in any case, he discarded his family when he began preaching (Mark 3: 31–5).

Galilee was governed by a series of Rome's client kings, first, at the time of Jesus' birth around 4 BC, Herod, and then, from shortly afterwards, his son Herod Antipas. So, it was never formally a province of the empire during Jesus' lifetime. Herod Antipas raised his own taxes and kept order himself, and archaeological evidence of any Greek or Roman influence is very limited. Jesus would only enter the Roman

empire proper when he travelled south from Galilee into Judaea which had been made a Roman province in AD 6.

Even though Galilee was a reasonably fertile area and not cut off entirely from the outside world, the Galileans had the reputation of being a tough and rather unsophisticated people, looked down upon by the more highly educated Jews of Jerusalem to the south. (The depiction of Jesus as an outsider to Judaea is well caught in chapter 7 of John's Gospel.) It was an unsettled time: the Herodian elite were exploiting their power, possibly taking land for themselves from the poor and disturbing traditional ways of life. Jesus responded to the distress. He began his preaching in about 27 BC after a 'baptism' by John the Baptist, a popular itinerant preacher. He was charismatic and straight-talking, attracting the poor and dispossessed and teaching them through parables set in daily life. He had little in common with the devout Jewish sectarians such as the Pharisees who laid immense emphasis on rigid adherence to Jewish law, the Torah. He was more in the tradition of the *Hasid*, the holy man, an individual who has the power to cure illnesses, exorcise devils, and heal the sins which Jewish teaching believed was their root cause. In Mark's Gospel especially his miracles are rooted in his compassion for others.

Yet the apocalyptic force of Jesus' preaching was considerable. His God was more immediate than the traditional one of the Jewish world. His coming was promised soon. His kingdom might even be already on the way, and He would have special care for the poor and rejected. The news of Jesus' healing powers and the urgency of his message spread quickly and crowds gathered to listen to him. Some of his followers, in tradition twelve in number, an echo perhaps of the lost twelve tribes of Israel, appear to have been especially close. Somehow the word spread that the kingdom might be coming to fruition in Jerusalem itself and eventually Jesus led his followers there to arrive for the feast of the Passover, probably in AD 30. They arrived with an immense sense of expectation but their pilgrimage to Jerusalem was to end in apparent disaster.

As was common with provincial administrations, the Romans had preserved the traditional elites in Judaea. The provincial governor, termed in Judaea a *praefectus*, ruled through the High Priest and did not even reside in Jerusalem but rather at Caesarea on the coast where he had inherited the luxurious palace of Herod. He only came to Jerusalem with his guards at major feasts such as the Passover when the crowds would be vast and the possibility of disorder all too real. Pontius Pilate, appointed as *praefectus* by the emperor Tiberius in AD 26, had outraged Jews by his insensitivity to their traditions. However, the High Priest Caiaphas, himself appointed some years earlier, in AD 18, proved Pilate's match. He knew he would risk the outrage of his fellow priests and the Jewish community at large if he proved too subservient to Pilate but ultimately his position depended on Pilate's support. Survival required a difficult balancing act but Caiaphas demonstrated his consummate political skills by remaining High Priest until AD 36, longer than any other recorded holder of the office.

Faced by the arrival of Jesus and his band of Galilean followers at the tensest time of the year, Caiaphas decided to act. Jesus offered an immediate challenge to the

priestly hierarchy and he had to be dealt with effectively. Under Roman law only a governor could order a death penalty and this meant that Pilate had to be persuaded that Jesus offered a threat to Roman rule. So it was that priests argued that Jesus had proclaimed himself no less than ‘the King of the Jews’, an affront not only to the hierarchy of the priesthood but to Roman sovereignty. Pilate may have hesitated but eventually agreed to give the order for Jesus to be crucified, the humiliating and prolonged execution method used freely throughout the empire against low-grade criminals. Sensitive perhaps to the risk that he might arouse popular anger, Caiaphas made no attempt to round up Jesus’ immediate followers and the Gospels suggest that they were free to visit the site where his mutilated body had been buried. Caiaphas arranged for Pilate’s troops to guard the tomb.

Jesus’ followers were shattered by his death, in particular by its humiliating form. (It was to be several hundred years before Christians could bring themselves to represent Christ dead hanging on the cross—the earliest known example is an eighth-century icon in St Catherine’s monastery in Sinai.) Yet from the despair arose hope. The Jews had already a conception of ‘resurrection’. A ‘resurrection’ of Jesus in particular is first talked of in the letters of the apostle Paul, especially the First Letter to the Corinthians (written in the mid-50s) where it is seen as the transformation of Jesus after his death from a physical to a spiritual body. ‘It is sown a physical body; it is raised a spiritual body’ (Corinthians 15: 44). Paul goes on to suggest that those committed to Christ, *Christos*, ‘the anointed one’, will be likewise transformed at death. ‘We shall not all die, but we shall be changed at a flash This perishable being [our mortal body] must be clothed with the imperishable and what is mortal must be clothed with the immortal.’ Paul claimed that there had been visions of the ‘risen Christ’ but he shows no awareness of an empty tomb.

Much later, in the Gospels, which were written well after Paul’s death, the emphasis is rather on the reappearance of Jesus as a physical body albeit in a form that could appear and disappear at will and pass through closed doors. These reappearances take place for up to forty days before Jesus is watched by his disciples ascending physically into heaven (Acts 1: 9). It is difficult to assess the background to the Gospel accounts—the resurrection appearances in Mark were only added in the second century and so the earliest accounts, those of Matthew and Luke, come well over fifty years after the crucifixion and depict different sets of first see-ers. For the historian there is certainly not sufficient evidence to talk of the coming to life of a dead body. (A resurrection narrative is not unique to Jesus even within the Gospels. Earlier, in the synoptic Gospels, for instance, Herod suggests that Jesus is John the Baptist reborn.) How far the belief in a physical resurrection was the catalyst for the founding of Christian communities is unclear. It cannot have been the only factor as important early sources, such as the Letter to the Hebrews, a text written earlier than the Gospels that provides a sophisticated statement of belief in a Jesus elevated to the highest point in heaven alongside God, and the hymn to Christ in the Letter to the Philippians (2: 5–11) hardly allude to the resurrection at all (only one reference in Hebrews at 13: 20). (See further on this Geza Vermes, *The Resurrection*, London, 2008. For the distinction between Paul and the Gospel accounts of the

resurrection see chapters 10 and 11 in Alan Segal, *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in the Religions of the West*, New York, 2004.)

However, there must have been more to provide a foundation for the early Christian communities than simply the memories of Jesus, stories of his resurrection, and the charisma of the apostles. The Eucharist is clearly an important ceremony and it centred on the consumption of the ‘body and blood’ of Jesus as a ‘thanksgiving’. Early Christians believed that through this participation they too might be able to move towards the spiritual body that Paul talks of. In his letter to the Christians of Philippi, Paul tells how Christ ‘will change our lowly body into the likeness of his glorious body, by the power which enables him to subject all things to himself’ (Philippians 3: 20). By the beginning of the second century Ignatius, bishop of Smyrna, refers to the Eucharist as ‘the medicine of immortality and an antidote, that we do not die, but live forever in Jesus Christ’. The ritual of the Eucharist with its promise of transformation of the body may well have been the cohesive force that gave coherence to the early Christian communities and ensured their survival. The sacrament of baptism, the welcoming of a new member into the community through purification by water, must also have been important in consolidating an exclusive community. (The rituals involved in baptism were recorded perhaps as early as AD 60–80 in the *Didache*, ‘The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles’.) Above all, perhaps, the conviction that initiation would lead to eternal salvation gave a dimension to the movement that contrasted with the drab portrayals of the afterworld of the pagan world.

Paul uses the word Christ, ‘the anointed one’ or ‘messiah’, frequently in his letters so its use is clearly an early development in Christian worship. The coming of a messiah who would deliver the Jews from bondage had long been part of Jewish belief but the Jewish messiah had always been seen as a powerful king coming in triumph (and using force to achieve power). Jesus’ life and death could hardly give him this status and it is unlikely that he would have claimed the title during his lifetime as he would have been picked up much earlier by the authorities as a potential threat to Jewish (and Roman) authority. However, he could be seen in a different sense, as a messiah who redeemed (freed humans from the consequences of their own sins) through his own suffering. (Several of the Psalms of David provide precedents for a suffering messiah.) In this sense Jesus marked a fresh beginning in God’s plan for mankind. Christians now talked of a ‘new’ covenant between God and his people to replace the traditional one of the Hebrew scriptures.

The impulses which led to the acceptance of Jesus as the messiah were not unique to Christianity. On the north-western shore of the Dead Sea to the east of Jerusalem in 1947 some shepherd boys stumbled upon a cache of leather and papyrus manuscripts hidden in caves around Qumran, the first of the celebrated Dead Sea Scrolls. More manuscripts were discovered and gradually the life of a Jewish community, members of the Essene sect, was revealed. The Essenes rejected worship in Jerusalem and lived as small communities in monastic seclusion in the wilderness, rigidly observing Jewish law. They shared their property, may have practised celibacy, and identified themselves strongly with the poor. They saw themselves as a privileged

group, God's elect, who were also waiting for a messiah who would usher in the kingdom of God. Meanwhile the Essenes studied the scriptures assiduously for prophecies of the messiah's coming (a vast amount has been learned about the formation of the Hebrew scriptures, the Christian Old Testament, from the surviving Scrolls). No direct links have been traced between the Qumran community and Christianity but the parallels are many. In one fragment the awaited 'Teacher of Righteousness' 'shall be proclaimed the son of God, and the son of the Most High they shall call him', an echo of Luke 1: 32–5. The Scrolls show that the Christian community was not alone in its sense of being a privileged people waiting for the coming of their God. (See Philip Davies et al. (eds.), *The Complete World of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, London and New York, 2002.)

The Early Christian Community and the Missions of Paul

Jesus' closest disciples remained in Jerusalem and struggled to keep their community intact. An early leader was the former fisherman Peter, who, according to Matthew's account, had been picked out by Jesus as the first leader of his movement. By AD 40, however, the dominant figure in the community appears to have been Jesus' brother James. The preoccupation of the small community at this time was to wait together until the coming of God, predicted by Jesus, took place. Its converts were mainly among Greek-speaking Jews, and soon small congregations appeared outside Jerusalem in the Jewish communities of large cities such as Damascus and Antioch. The synagogues in these large cosmopolitan cities traditionally attracted gentiles (non-Jews) to their services and it must have been through these 'godfearers', as they were known, that the story of Jesus first leaked out into the gentile world.

At first it had little impact. The Jerusalem leaders, Peter and James, wedded to their Jewish background, insisted that Jesus was only for those who were circumcised and who obeyed Jewish dietary laws. Uncircumcised gentiles could not be admitted to the sect. It took one of the most remarkable figures of early Christianity to break this taboo. Paul was a Greek-speaking Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia and a Roman citizen who had come to Jerusalem to train as a rabbi. (The most likely reason for Paul's Roman citizenship in this period and this region was that he was descended from a freed slave (as argued by Jerome Murphy O'Connor in his biographies of Paul).) At first he had shared the Pharisees' distrust of Jesus and joined in persecution of Christians but then, on the road north from Jerusalem to Damascus, he had a vision of Jesus and became a believer.

It was some time, at least three years, before Paul made contact with the Christian community in Jerusalem. He was probably much younger than its leaders (he may have been born as late as AD 10) and, unlike them, had never known Jesus. In his letters to the early Christian communities he makes almost no reference to Jesus as a historical person. (While there is no full consensus among scholars, the genuine letters of Paul are assumed to be those to the Romans, the two letters to the Corinthians,

Galatians, the First Letter to the Thessalonians, Philippians, and the short letter to Philemon. The other New Testament letters attributed to Paul are probably written later in the century.) However, Paul had few doubts as to who Jesus was and what his message meant. He was the Christ who had come to redeem those, Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female alike, who showed faith in him. Those who put their trust in Jesus would be saved. Paul's emphasis is thus on faith rather than rigid adherence to Jewish law. Many of Paul's letters (those to the Corinthians in particular) are concerned with the problems that arise when believers are freed from the rigid constraints of a moral code and have to define a new code of behaviour that is compatible with their faith in Jesus.

Paul insisted that uncircumcised gentiles could become Christians and he argued his case against the restrictive attitudes of the Jerusalem community with vigour. He only got his way when he agreed that his gentile churches would collect money for the church in Jerusalem. There followed broad agreement that the Jerusalem leaders would continue to preach to Jews while Paul would be leader of the mission to the gentiles. Nevertheless, the relationship between the two missions was a tense one. Paul later told the Galatian Christians of a public row he had had with Peter in Antioch. Peter had been prepared at first to eat with gentiles but when joined by fellow Jewish Christians from Jerusalem withdrew from doing so. His behaviour infuriated Paul who felt that Peter had no right to make gentiles follow Jewish ways.

The activities of Paul and the early Christian community are described in the Acts of the Apostles, composed probably after AD 85 by Luke as a sequel to his Gospel. An educated Greek, Luke was writing within the historical traditions established by Thucydides and he may have been present at some of the events he records. He probably had no written sources and it is believed that the speeches he places in the mouths of his main characters are, like those of Thucydides, shaped to the personality of the speaker and the occasion on which he was speaking. This leads to some scholars viewing the historical accuracy of Acts with caution ('vivid but unreliable' in the words of the scholar Philip Rousseau). Luke has a wider message. He attempts to place the Christian story within the context of world history and, more than any other Gospel writer, he shows a detailed knowledge of the Roman world. His account of Paul's shipwreck on the way to Rome, for instance, is a valuable piece of historical evidence in its own right. It was to be 250 years before another such detailed work of church history (that by Eusebius) was to be composed.

Paul is the central character in Acts and it was his energy and beliefs that transformed the young Christian communities. He travelled on his missionary journeys through Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, Greece, and even as far west as Rome at the end of his life (where, by tradition, he was martyred) inspiring the first Christians and struggling tirelessly to achieve some coherence and unity in their beliefs. Even so one must not overestimate the impact of Paul. The Christian communities in Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome were all founded without reference to him, while there is no evidence of the survival of the Christian communities in the cities of Galatia,

the recipients of one of Paul's most impassioned letters. Yet the fact that several letters in the New Testament that are dated later in the first century, well after Paul's death (Ephesians, Colossians, and Thessalonians and the 'pastoral letters'), were attributed to him shows his lasting influence. His championship by Augustine in the Roman Catholic tradition and Martin Luther in the Protestant has ensured his dominant role in the Christian tradition to this day.

Theologically Paul laid a new emphasis on the crucial role of 'faith', specifically condemning the pagan philosophers for their 'empty logic' and thus arguably setting in place a conflict between Christianity and the Greek tradition of rational thinking. His abhorrence of sexuality (especially homosexuality) was much more pronounced than that of Jesus (who laid a greater emphasis on the sanctity of the marriage bond rather than any distaste for sexuality as such). While Jesus appears to have been relaxed about his exercise of authority, Paul was much less secure, partly because often he had no direct contact with the scattered recipients of his letters and constantly feared that in his absence they were losing their way. His stress on the importance of Christian authority was to become influential in the fourth century when the church needed to consolidate its own position.

Equally influential for the Christian tradition was Paul's depiction of the human personality as at war with itself. 'I have been sold as a slave to sin. I fail to carry out the things I want to do, and find myself doing the very things I hate... I know of nothing good living in me,' as he told the Romans. As seen earlier (p. 285), this sense of internal struggle was also intrinsic to Plato's concept of the soul and by the fourth century Plato and Paul's depictions of inner conflict had coalesced to provide a specifically Christian pathology of sin, 'original sin', as Augustine, drawing on Paul's letters, was to define it (see below, pp. 624–5).

By the second century the gentile communities represented mainstream Christianity. The Christian communities in Jerusalem appear to have been eclipsed after the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. The separation of Christianity from Judaism was a tortuous process and the boundaries between the two faiths were always fluid. Christians believed, like Jews, that there was only one God, who deserved exclusive worship, and that those who believed were a people set apart. It is hard to imagine the later success of Christianity without this cohesion and sense of exclusiveness. The elders of a Jewish synagogue may have provided a model for the priesthood, and the Jewish condemnation of idols was transferred into the Christian tradition, again by Paul. There was also a shared ethical tradition. Jews valued chastity and the stability of family life. They visited the sick, and supported the poor. Sometimes, as with the Qumran community, they held property in common. This was echoed by early Christian behaviour. 'We Christians hold everything in common except our wives,' said the second-century Tertullian.

While some Christians, such as Marcion who arrived in Rome from the Black Sea area in c.140, argued that the Hebrew scriptures should be rejected as incompatible with faith in Jesus, they were retained and valued for what were seen as references—in Isaiah, for instance—to the coming of Jesus. The Old Testament, as it became known, remained an integral part of the body of Christian scripture, even

if the God of the Old Testament, with his exclusive relationship with one people and a heavy emphasis on the destruction of his enemies, sits ill at ease with the more gentle and approachable God preached by Jesus.

The adoption of the Hebrew scriptures and their story of the relationship between God and humanity that stretched back to the creation gave Christianity a narrated past it would otherwise have lacked. There is a fascinating document, probably from the 150s, the *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, in which one Justin, who had emigrated to Rome from a Roman colony in Samaria and who had come to Christianity after making a path through Greek philosophy, debates with Trypho over these issues. Trypho refuses to acknowledge that the coming of Christ can be predicted in the scriptures and accuses the Christians of manipulating the original texts. Justin responds that the Jews had indeed once enjoyed God's favour but these gifts had now been transferred to the Christians. Justin does not try to dominate or denigrate his opponent but there was a more hostile approach to Judaism, recorded perhaps first in Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians but developed in the so-called Epistle of Barnabas of c.130, which claims that the Jews had separated themselves from God and so deserved to be deprived of their scriptures. In the last third of the second century Melito, the bishop of Sardis, excoriated the Jews for killing God himself through their involvement in the crucifixion of Jesus. So was founded the tradition of *Adversus Judaeos*, a body of polemic aimed at the Jews that was to remain part of Christian ideology for many centuries.

The Early Christian Communities

The early Christian communities are poorly recorded. They met in private houses or halls joined to these houses (see the classic Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, New Haven and London, 1983). However, as the historian Ramsay MacMullen has shown in his study *The Second Church* (Atlanta, 2009), there was also considerable activity around the tombs of martyrs. Funerary rites, including commemorative feasts, had always taken place there and the pagan rituals could be adapted to the veneration of Christian saints and martyrs. So, MacMullen argues, a more popular church emerges, flourishing outside the walls of cities and perhaps drawing in the rural masses who were neglected by the more established urban Christian communities. These forgotten congregations, who may, MacMullen suggests, have made up as much as 95 per cent of the Christian population, will probably be given greater prominence as the excavations of early Christian burial sites continue.

Whether the focus of worship was the tomb or the house church, Christianity spread. Later Christian writers argued that God had created the Roman empire, with its wide-flung trading routes, specifically so that Christianity might spread more easily. The openness of the empire certainly helps explain the geographical range of the early communities. A surviving correspondence between the emperor Trajan and Pliny the Younger, the governor of Bithynia and Pontus (in what is now

north-western Turkey), on how to deal with Christians makes it clear that Christian communities had already travelled that far by the early second century. There were many Christian communities in Asia Minor, Syria, and along the north African coast in Egypt and Libya. A number of distinct congregations had also been founded in Rome by Greek-speaking immigrant Christians from different parts of the empire—Greek remained the language of the liturgy in Rome until as late as 380. (The idea that there had been a single Christian church in Rome under one bishop, a ‘pope’, from the earliest times was a development of the late second century—see Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries*, Minneapolis, 2003.) There is no evidence of a Latin-speaking Christian church until about 180 in Carthage where Tertullian, a robust and outspoken figure, provided the first Christian texts in Latin, and so earns the accolade as the earliest Latin theologian. In short, the early church was essentially Greek.

The geographical spread of the early church communities meant that uniformity of worship could not be expected. There was some acknowledgement that Rome, as the result of a tradition, recorded certainly from 150 AD, and possibly earlier, that the apostle Peter had been martyred there, and buried outside the walls on the Vatican hill, should be given some supremacy, but this could never be enforced. It is clear that the essential elements of Christian belief were still fluid and that different communities highlighted different sacred texts, favouring perhaps just one of the Gospels, for instance. Yet the idea of a single empire-wide church does appear in the work of Irenaeus, the Greek bishop of Lyon. His *Adversus Haereses*, ‘Against the Heretics’, of about 180, is now seen as one of the founding documents of Christian orthodoxy.

Irenaeus sets out the narrative of Christian history from the time of Adam, with the arrival of Christ marking a New Covenant. The teachings of Christ are enshrined in the four, and, Irenaeus stresses, only four, Gospels. (As there were many early texts circulating this was an important moment in the formation of an authoritative New Testament, a canon.) The message of Christ must be preserved through the generations until the Last Judgement and Irenaeus argued that this was done through the apostles, the bishops they had consecrated, and so from bishop to bishop through time. This was the principle of ‘apostolic succession’, the bishops preserving the core of Christian doctrine. However, there would always be heretics who attempted to throw Irenaeus’ church off its predestined path and they must be resisted. (The Greek word *haeresis* originally meant ‘choice’ but in this Christian context came to mean ‘wrong choice’.) The church, in short, has ‘one soul and one and the same heart, she proclaims and teaches and hands on those things with one voice, as if possessed of a single mouth’. (Jaroslav Pelikan’s *The Christian Tradition*, i (of five): *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition, 100–600*, Chicago and London, 1973, provides a stimulating survey.)

Irenaeus’ conception of a church represented an ideal that was not to be realized for 200 years. Meanwhile the Christian communities were marginal groups. They rejected the pagan gods and ceremonies of the state (which invariably involved sacrifices to the gods) and so played no part in the public life of the community. They

carried out their worship out of sight, ‘gabbling in dark corners’ as one critic put it, and insisted on a strict programme of instruction, normally lasting three years, before catechumens could be baptized and participate fully in the Eucharist that remained at the core of worship. Inevitably stories proliferated of Christians eating human flesh or indulging in free sex, but the limited evidence suggests high moral standards, especially in sexual behaviour, a rejection of the Roman custom of exposing unwanted babies, and an organized system of care for members of the community especially widows. In Rome 1,500 poor were being fed by the church by the middle of the third century while fifty years later the community at Antioch was providing food for 3,000 destitute people. An ascetic streak in early Christianity appears to have attracted virgins and widows in particular.

Christians took care over their burials, favouring the Jewish custom of preserving the body rather than burning it. Around Rome the soft tufa rock allowed galleries to be cut into it with recesses for bodies carved out of their sides. One early Christian burial site by the Appian Way bore the name ‘by the hollow’ and the Greek for this gives the word ‘catacomb’. The word was used to describe the hundreds of galleries constructed around Rome as the Christian community in the city grew in the second and third centuries. The catacombs are moving places to visit and they are also treasuries of very early Christian art. There are scenes from both the Old and New Testament. Jonah being saved from the whale and Daniel from the lions’ den are common Old Testament themes that emphasize the power of God to save those in peril. Jonah is always shown emerging from the whale after three days without any blemish, just as Christ rises as the perfect body after three days in the tomb. Particularly interesting are the representations of Jesus. Here pagan art provides the models for Jesus as Good Shepherd or the Sun of Righteousness, in one instance being carried up to heaven in the chariot of the sun. In some cases he is portrayed as if he were the pagan hero Orpheus who had the ability to calm beasts through the playing of a lyre. The suggestion is that Jesus will also bring peace to those around him. (See Robin Jensen, *Understanding Christian Art*, London and New York, 2000, for a probing introduction.)

An opponent of Christianity, Celsus, whose attack, written about 180, was influenced as much by his sense of social superiority as by distrust of Christianity *per se*, recorded woolworkers, cobblers, and laundry-workers among the congregations, going on to argue that Christianity was only suitable for the most ignorant, slaves, women, and little children. Recent scholarship suggests that individuals of wealthier backgrounds were, in fact, members of the church from its earliest days, some providing their houses as meeting places. With time there is more evidence of converts of higher social status. In the *Protoevangelium of James*, a second-century narrative that describes the infancy of the Virgin Mary, her father Joachim is described as ‘exceedingly rich’, a fascinating example of how Mary becomes socially ‘upgraded’ early in the Christian tradition. (The *Protoevangelium* became very popular in the Middle Ages and is often represented in fresco cycles.)

It is important, however, not to overestimate the success of early Christianity. Perhaps 2 per cent of the empire were Christians by AD 250 with virtually no

Christian presence in the west of the empire or along its northern frontiers. The boundaries between what was Christian and what was pagan were not clearly drawn nor was conversion necessarily permanent. The Greek theologian Origen (see further below) told of bishops in Egypt who exploited their status in their own interests, and Tertullian seems to have withdrawn from the institutional church of Carthage altogether. Inevitably many Christian communities failed and their members lapsed. A major issue in the third and early fourth centuries was how to deal with those who abandoned the churches when persecution threatened.

Christianity and the Greek Philosophical Tradition

In the diatribe he launched against Christianity, Celsus had complained of the ignorance and credulity of Christians, and by the late second century it was a charge that educated Christians began to take seriously. Already Christians had had to defend themselves against Gnosticism, a movement that reached its height in the second century. The Gnostics taught that the souls of human beings were imprisoned in their earthly bodies but could be liberated through the acquisition of ‘knowledge’ (*gnosis* in Greek). Christ, who the Gnostics believed had had no earthly existence, was one of the mediators between man and the divine. So this was a much more other-worldly approach but, interesting though the Gnostics’ texts are, they became lost in extravagant imagery and exotic myth. Gnostics would never have formed a church; their ideas were simply too esoteric to form any kind of coherent theology or support an institutional structure. (See, in a subject awash with speculative surveys, the balanced account by Karen King, *What is Gnosticism?*, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 2003.) Another second-century movement, Montanism, which arose in Anatolia, relied on charismatic prophecy, with its main adherents, Montanus and two women, Prisca and Maximilla, claiming their utterances were the words of the Holy Spirit. This too was rejected by more educated converts who were beginning to seek a more rational basis for doctrine. So, in the Greek world, in particular, Christians began adapting Greek philosophy for their needs.

The first century AD had seen a revival of Platonism. (Platonic philosophy of the first to third centuries AD is normally known as Middle Platonism to distinguish it from the later Neoplatonism of Plotinus and his followers (see below, p. 598).) Plato’s ‘the good’ (see p. 284) was for the Middle Platonists a supreme reality, whose existence transcended human thought. It was possible to grasp the nature of ‘the good’ but only through a rigorous intellectual quest, an intense and penetrating meditation on what ‘the good’ might be. An understanding of ‘the good’ helped, however, give the physical world meaning and value, especially as ‘the good’ intervened to give order to the universe and foster its continued progress. Middle Platonism gave the name *theos* to ‘the good’ and this can be translated as ‘God’. Plato’s Forms were seen by these philosophers as ‘the thoughts of God’. (From now on ‘the Good’ will be given a capital, to suggest its elevation to a supreme spiritual force.)

One of the dialogues of Plato that began to permeate Christian thought was the *Timaeus* that dealt with the problem of the creation of the world. Plato had talked of the creation as essentially a bringing into order that which was formless. The first verses of the Book of Genesis could be interpreted in the same way, as they were, for instance, by Justin Martyr. ‘God in his goodness created everything from formless matter’ (*First Apology*; 10: 2). Yet this early acceptance of a bringing to order of chaos was rejected in the second century by Christian thinkers such as Basilides of Alexandria who argued that such a limited role diminished the grandeur of God. So emerged the idea that creation had been *ex nihilo*, ‘out of nothing’, thus giving God an appropriate status as Creator. It gradually became the dominant Christian belief on the matter and it remains so.

Even if Plato was rejected in this instance, Middle Platonism began to permeate the writings of Christians. Clement of Alexandria, writing around 190–200, was determined to show would-be converts that Christians were well able to hold their own intellectually with pagans and had no fear of Greek philosophy. Plato and the Platonists, argued Clement, had grasped the nature of God (possibly, he said, through reading the Hebrew scriptures) and had shown that his existence could be defended through the use of reason. In this sense the philosophers acted as schoolmasters bringing pagans to Christ. Yet Clement also recognized the importance of faith as a means of providing a bedrock from which further spiritual growth could take place. This combination of faith and reason was a sophisticated answer to the likes of Celsus who argued that Christianity was based on no more than woolly emotion and credulity. (See further the postscript to this chapter on Plotinus.)

The Platonists did not, however, mention Christ. The idea that ‘the Good/God’ could influence human history through the activity of a human being, whether divine or not, born in one specific place and at one point of time, was, in fact, alien to Platonism. Christians had therefore to find their own method of integrating Christ into the Platonist principles they had absorbed. One view first articulated in John’s Gospel, but later taken up by the church in Alexandria, was that Jesus represented the *logos*. *Logos* was a concept developed by Greek philosophers (Stoics as well as Platonists) to describe the force of reason that, they argued, had come into being as part of creation. *Logos* is a complex term, used in many different contexts, and it was precisely the range of these that provided flexibility for the theologians. (The conventional English translation as ‘the Word’ conceals the wealth of its original meanings in Greek.) *Logos*, for instance, was described as the intellectual power with which human beings were able to understand the divine world so, in this sense, *logos* created an overlap between the physical world and the divine. Christ could be portrayed as *logos* created by God in human form and sent by him into the world to act as an intermediary between God and man (‘an ambassador’ as one account suggested). This still left aspects of Christ’s relationship with God unclear. Those who followed John in accepting Christ as *logos* had then to determine whether he was an indivisible part of God, of the same substance with the Father, or a separate entity distinct from the Father as in an earthly father–son relationship. Justin Martyr had argued for the second option. Jesus may have been God from the

beginning of time but separate from the Father in the same way that one torch lit from another is separate. Tertullian (c.160–c.240) followed him in arguing Jesus as *logos* was only part of God and subordinate to him.

In Carthage, the second city of the western, Latin-speaking, empire, the truculent Tertullian showed a less welcoming approach to Greek philosophy. Tertullian revelled in being outspoken and his colourful rhetoric seems to have been used largely for effect. (An analysis of his writings suggests a background as a lawyer.) Christianity should be believed, he proclaimed, because its claims were so ridiculous. The resurrection was certain just because it was impossible. Rather than illuminating the path towards Christ, he went on, the philosophers had been the inspiration for heretics: Plato had inspired the Gnostics, for instance. Tertullian was particularly harsh on Aristotle whom he accused of spreading contention. Dialectical argument was no more than a fruitless method ‘of building up and pulling down’. In a famous peroration, Tertullian challenges his listeners: ‘What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between [Plato’s] Academy and the Church?’ Tertullian therefore represented another strand in the complex and diverse theologies of early Christianity, the elevation of faith above reason, an approach that might be traced back to Paul’s rejection of ‘the wisdom of the wise’.

The most intellectually brilliant of these early theologians was Origen (184–254). Origen was an austere figure, deeply affected, it was said, by the martyrdom of his Christian father. His life’s work lay in biblical scholarship, bringing together and commenting on different versions of the Old Testament, which he placed alongside each other for comparison. The resulting treatise, the *Hexapla*, remained the most sophisticated research tool for biblical criticism for centuries to come. (Only a few fragments now remain.) Origen also made important contributions to the concept of Christ as *logos*. For Origen God had originally created all souls as equal parts of his goodness but gradually all failed to worship him and they fell from union with him into the material world. From here they had to be redeemed and restored to union with God in the original state of goodness. How was this to be done? Luckily, argued Origen, there was one soul which had never fallen away from God and which remained bound to him in adoration. It was this soul united to the *logos* which became incarnated in the body of the Virgin Mary and was born as Jesus. He was the instrument of redemption. Those souls who had fallen downwards into human bodies could use him as inspiration for the long climb back to God.

Origen was also important for following Plato in distinguishing the few (those whom Plato had called ‘Guardians’) who could grasp the reality of ‘the Good’ and the masses who were diverted by their sensual natures and lack of commitment from being able to do so. For them it was vital to stress the importance of faith. As Origen, in a passage deeply influenced by Plato, put it, ‘As this matter of faith is so much talked of, I have to reply that we accept it as useful for the multitude, and that we admittedly teach those who cannot abandon everything and pursue a study of rational argument to believe without thinking out their reasons.’ In proposing a rationale for the imposition of beliefs by an elite onto the majority, this would prove an unhappy precedent.

Origen's views that Christ as *logos* was distinct from God the Father were among those that were rejected by the Council of Nicaea and this made him a marked man (see the Arian controversy, p. 604 below). Origen had also argued that no one, even Satan, was beyond the redeeming power of God's love. There was, therefore, no need for a hell to contain the irredeemably evil. By the late fourth century, when scholars such as Jerome and Augustine were arguing for the reality of hell as a place of everlasting torment for those who had not received the favour of God, the less forbidding views of Origen and his followers had been superseded. In 553 Origen was condemned as a heretic at the Council of Constantinople. (See below, p. 666, for the context.)

The adoption of Platonism by Christian theologians was thus of immense importance. Plato had always argued that a minority could, through reason, grasp the eternal truths, which were ultimately more 'real' than any truth in this transient world, and impose them on the rest of society. This provided a rationale for church authority if the Platonic minority could be equated with the church hierarchy or the bishops meeting in council. Moreover Plato's denigration of those who let their souls be ruled by sensual pleasure also fitted well with the ascetic impulses of many Christians. Later Plato's view that things of beauty or grandeur on this earth could provide an imitation of heaven was used to justify opulent church buildings. In short it is impossible to imagine Christian theology without its Platonic backbone but while Plato's original teachings had never been enforced, eventually they would be, in their absorbed form, through the institutional church as it was established by the state in the fourth century (see further below, chapter 33).

Cohesion was also being established between the Christian communities although it was a slow and often painful development. The creed affirmed by all seeking baptism included acceptance of God as the Father, Jesus Christ as the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the Resurrection. (The Holy Spirit refers to the activity of God shown in the world, typically as the power of healing, casting out devils, or prophesying through the medium of ordinary human beings, but also as the instrument through which Mary conceived Jesus.) Gradually the sacred writings of the church were gathered into a Bible of selected books of the Old and New Testament (the Greek word *biblia* means 'the books'), although the disputes over which early Christian writings should or should not be included took some time to resolve. It is only in the middle of the fourth century that there is a final New Testament in the form it is read today. Those texts not accepted were gradually discarded or in some cases declared heretical. Most have now disappeared.

There was still, however, no supreme human leader of the church. The bishops of Rome, Antioch, and Alexandria had gained some prominence in their local areas with the right to consecrate the bishops of smaller cities, although they still vigorously refused any submission to each other. An ideal was set out by Cyprian the bishop of the important city of Carthage (grandly rebuilt by the Romans following its destruction in 146 BC). Cyprian is typical of the new class of bishops in that he came from a prosperous background and consciously rejected the honours his status would have earned him in pagan society. He was acclaimed bishop by the

Christian population in 248 or 249, only three years after his conversion. He defined his authority as if he were a Roman provincial governor with heretics being described as if they were rebels. In his treatise *De Unitate*, 'On the unity of the Catholic Church' (251), Cyprian argued that all bishops should act in consensus with no one bishop supreme over others. For Cyprian the church was the only body capable of authoritative Christian teaching and no true Christian could exist outside it. 'He no longer has God for his father, who does not have the Church for his mother.' This definition of a church claiming exclusive authority over all Christians had immense implications for the future of Christianity and was, of course, a radical break with any concept of religious authority hitherto known in the Greek and Roman world.

However much Cyprian might talk of authority, he had no means of ensuring that it was obeyed. The practical problems were shown when persecution broke out. Cyprian argued that anyone who lapsed from the church had rendered void their original baptism and must show complete repentance if it was to be renewed. He seemed to have broad support for his stance until a new bishop of Rome, Stephen, was elected in 253. Stephen was one of the first popes to claim his supreme authority as heir to Peter. He argued that the original baptism remained valid and his assertion of authority set the two men on a collision course. Could Rome impose doctrine on provincial bishops? The matter was unresolved because Stephen died in 257 and Cyprian himself was executed for his faith the following year, but the dispute showed that this was still a church where ultimate authority remained unresolved.

The Persecutions

Cyprian's execution came during the persecution of Valerian (see above, p. 565) and it highlighted the insecurity of the Christian communities. As early as 64 Christians were used as scapegoats by the emperor Nero when seeking to allocate blame for the fire at Rome. Nero could exploit the distrust of Christians as easterners and the seclusion in which their activities took place. There was seldom, however, any concerted activity against the early Christians and no empire-wide decree against them. Those who were considered troublesome were prosecuted under the traditional powers given to provincial governors to maintain good order but, as Trajan had advised Pliny, Christians should not be sought out specifically and those who had lapsed were of no concern at all.

While the emperors of the second century were hostile or indifferent to Christians, this did not always result in persecution. Hadrian, for instance, ordered that action should only be taken against Christians if they could be shown as actively plotting against the Roman government, and that anyone bringing unjustified prosecutions against Christians should themselves be prosecuted. In Rome in the middle of the second century, the Christian communities were relatively unmolested. Marcus Aurelius, on the other hand, was more openly antagonistic. In 177 the governor of Lugdunum asked the emperor Marcus Aurelius' advice on how to deal

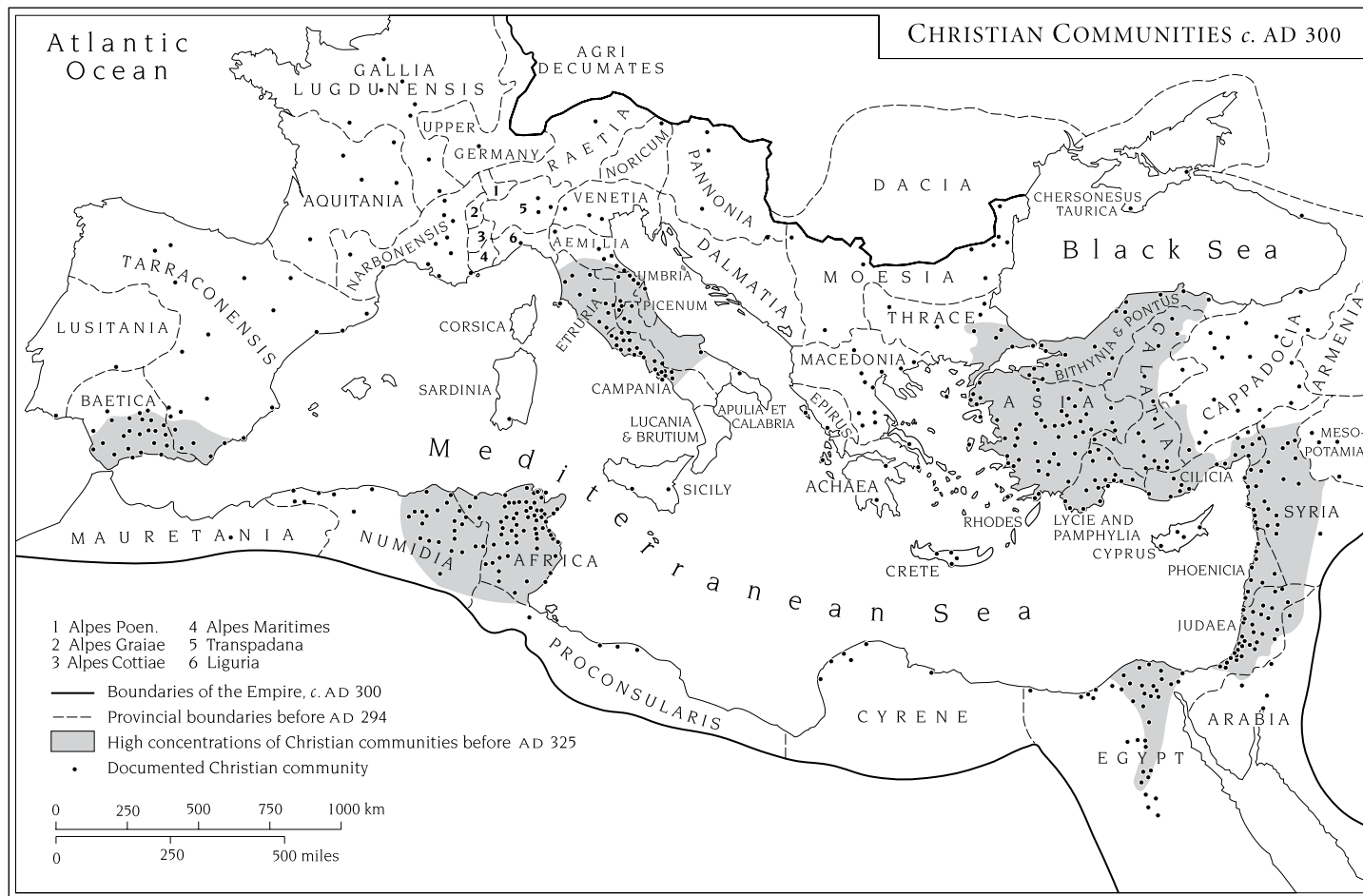
with the Christian community. The emperor replied that those who recanted could be set free but those who did not could be condemned to the arena or, if they were citizens, beheaded. In his *Church History*, Eusebius provides a harrowing account of the aftermath when what was clearly an immigrant Christian community was rounded up. Among the forty-eight put to death a slave girl, Blandina, stood out for her courage. It was said that her death aroused enthusiasm among other Christians, for whom a painful but sudden death seemed little price to pay for the guarantee of eternal bliss in heaven.

There were clearly complex psychological elements of martyrdom. In north Africa in particular, there are signs of a collective willingness among communities to face death for their beliefs, with others attracted to Christianity as a result of their example. Tertullian put it succinctly: 'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.' One of the conflicts within the early Christian communities was over whether one should seek martyrdom as a passage to heaven or make every attempt to avoid it by keeping out of sight. In effect, this was an extension of a much deeper split in the church between those who wished to compromise with and live within Roman society and those who saw Christians as a race apart and this a transient life.

One of the most moving of early Christian documents, in fact the most important surviving example of a woman's voice from these early centuries, is the prison diary kept by Perpetua, an early martyr who died with her slave girl, Felicity, in the arena at Carthage in 203. Perpetua's father desperately tried to persuade her to renounce her faith, especially as she was still nursing her infant daughter, but Perpetua stood firm and in prison appears to have exercised a leadership role over other Christian prisoners. She met her death with dignity, even, it was said, guiding the gladiator's sword to her throat. It could be argued the very specific context of martyrdom shaped a role for women as leaders that was denied to them in the everyday activities of the churches.

The persecution of Christians reached its fullest extent in the third and early fourth centuries but even then it was not consistent. It was inevitable that those who refused to sacrifice to the gods would be confronted when the continuing defeats of the empire suggested that those gods were deserting Rome. Under Decius, the requirement to sacrifice made no mention of Christians, although many died when they openly refused to comply. Under Valerian, bishops were the prime targets, but then there were some forty years of comparative peace under Gallienus and his successors. By the end of the third century Christianity was winning converts higher in the social scale so that even Diocletian's wife was rumoured to have Christian sympathies. Bishops were becoming well-known local figures, running large and well-organized communities and distributing alms among their members, and in doing so filling gaps left by the decay of traditional institutions.

The most intensive and brutal persecutions of all took place under Diocletian and his successor Galerius between 303 and 312. The spread of Christianity among the troops appears to have been the catalyst. The edict was issued from Nicomedia and ordered the destruction of churches and the burning of scriptures while



MAP 18

Christians of rank were to lose their privileges. A later edict authorized the arrest of church leaders. It was a last ditch attempt to deal with a community which was infiltrating not only the army but the bureaucracy and even the imperial household. Outside the legions, the vigour of repression depended very much on the initiative of local governors and many Christian communities escaped persecution completely. Constantius seems to have ignored the edicts, while Galerius enforced them with enthusiasm, renewing persecution between 305 and 311. There are other accounts of governors who tried to find compromises so that they would not have to order an execution. However, the random nature of the attacks, in which official backing was often given to the activities of lynch mobs, was frightening. The historian Eusebius gives graphic details of the different ways in which communities across the empire were targeted and the methods of execution chosen. The Christian Lactantius, writing in the same period, told of the terrible punishments God would exact in retaliation for these enormities.

Yet persecution was counter-productive and the pragmatic emperors realized it. Even Galerius had relented by 311. Stricken with cancer, he now enjoined Christians ‘to pray to their god for our health and the safety of the state’. It was a remarkable turnaround in attitude even if Galerius offered no compensation for property he had ordered destroyed. After Galerius’ death, the new Augustus, Licinius, went much further, especially when, after prayers to ‘the Supreme God’, he emerged as victorious over his rival Maximinus in 313. The Edict of Milan (see earlier, p. 578) linked the Christian God with military victory in a way that could never have been envisaged before.

Postscript: Plotinus

It may seem odd to attach the most celebrated pagan philosopher of the third century to a chapter on Christianity but, as noted above, Christian theology as it emerged was always linked to the Platonic concept of a world beyond the material that held far greater value than this one. Like Middle Platonism, Neoplatonism is an artificial term, only created in the nineteenth century to define the later developments in the Platonic tradition. It has as its greatest figure Plotinus. Plotinus (205–70) was a Greek born in Egypt where he had easy access to the works of not only Plato but also Pythagoras, Aristotle, and the Stoics. If this was not enough, he hoped to travel eastwards to study Indian philosophy (but never made it). He finally made his life in Rome where he practised as a philosopher whose teaching was open to all but was naturally most appreciated by the educated elite of the city. It was one of his devoted students, Porphyry, who recorded his life and brought together his works (publishing the *Enneads*, treatises ‘arranged in sets of nine’—six of these, making fifty-four treatises in total—in 301).

Platonism had always been a hierarchy of ideas with the soul progressing upwards through the exercise of rational thought to higher levels of understanding. Plotinus breathed new vigour into this tradition, now some 600 years old. Although

he may not have seen himself as an original thinker but simply as a traditional Platonist. Plotinus defined a hierarchy of 'Soul', 'Intellect', and 'The One' more coherently than earlier Platonists. Every living being, including plants, had a soul which, Plotinus argued, had a natural desire to reach for further understanding. In fact the highest form of being consisted in rejecting earthly desires in order to reach towards 'Intellect'. So there is a strong ascetic streak in Neoplatonism as well as a stress on the need for introspection. Plotinus was also typical of pagans of his time in turning away from traditional rituals, such as sacrifice, as a means of reaching the divine.

The 'Intellect' is composed of all the Platonic Forms or Ideas but represents a reduction of the complexity of the material world. Therefore, reaching the state of 'Intellect', and seeing all the Forms as a whole in relation to each other, is achieving a form of peace and understanding. But one can move further beyond this to 'the One'. 'The One' is the first principle existing as of and within itself without any explanation for its being. It is a peak of the hierarchy and within it all the complexities of the lower stages of the hierarchy are resolved. Yet at the same time it is the ultimate source of the complexity of the world and so its presence also emanates downwards but without diminishing itself, in the same way, Plotinus tells us, that the Sun continuously emanates light without actually doing anything beyond existing as it is. Grasping the uniqueness of 'The One' is a mystical experience in itself. As Plotinus put it: 'When in this state the soul would exchange its present state for nothing in the world, though it were offered the kingdom of all the heavens; for this is "the One" and there is nothing better'. Porphyry says that Plotinus attained this higher state four times during the time he knew him. However, Plotinus argued that ultimately 'the One' was unknowable and perhaps might more easily be described in terms of what it was not.

So where does Platonism fit within the Christian tradition, especially when Porphyry later attacked Christianity so powerfully that his works were suppressed by the church? Plotinus, like his Platonic predecessors, had no need for an individual such as Jesus Christ to mediate between the earthly searcher and the ultimate non-material truths. The view that Jesus the Son was subordinate to God the Father, as in Arianism (see below, p. 604), might possibly have been reconcilable with Neoplatonist hierarchies but when Arianism/subordinationism was condemned in the fourth century (see below, p. 615) this avenue was closed. One has to explore the moments when Christianity came into contact with Neoplatonism to see what other possibilities there were.

By the 350s Neoplatonism had pervaded the schools of Athens and it was here that some of the church fathers encountered Plotinus' works. Gregory of Nyssa, one of the most sophisticated theologians of the period (see below, p. 615), was already drawn to a mystical approach to the experience of God and seems to have absorbed Plotinus' concept of an ultimate experience with 'the One' or, in Christian terminology, 'God'. Plotinus' belief that, ultimately, God is unknowable was developed by pseudo-Dionysius (see below, p. 667). in what is known as apophatic theology, the theology that describes God in terms of what he is not.

Plotinus was more immediately influential in Milan, by the 380s the most important city in the western empire. Here his works penetrated through Marius Victorinus, a bilingual rhetorician, who made the first Latin translations. Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, cites Plotinus in his works but it was the theologian Augustine who went further in reading several works of Plotinus (it is disputed which ones) as he made his intellectual journey from Platonism to Christianity. Through Plotinus Augustine appears to have absorbed the importance of the eternity of ‘the One’, thus God, the need to look inwards to find God, and the belief that all things exist only insofar as they derive their existence from God. Where Augustine disagreed with Plotinus was on the perfect nature of the soul. For Augustine the soul was fallen (through ‘original sin, see p. 625) and only through the example of Christ and the grace of God could it be made whole. Despite this disagreement, it was through Plotinus’ Platonism that Augustine came to recognize that Platonic thinking was instrumental by providing a path towards Christianity and contributing intellectual backbone for much of Christian belief. It was largely through the authority of Augustine that Platonism remained influential in western Christianity.

Constantine and Christianity

In histories of the Roman empire it has been traditional to make a chapter break between Diocletian and Constantine so that the latter could be welcomed as the first Christian emperor. It is certain that without imperial support Christianity would never have been more than the religion of a minority and to this extent the toleration and active support of Christians by Constantine does mark an important turning point in the history of the western world. Yet there was also much continuity. Politically, Constantine and Licinius were following Diocletian's initiatives. It is in this period that Diocletian's new system of provinces is recorded as working effectively for the first time and it is with Constantine and Licinius that we find each Augustus making legislation for his own sphere of territory and accepting that the other had similar rights. Diocletian's reforms were sustained and consolidated by Constantine, especially in the years 324 to 337 when he was sole emperor.

It may also be misleading to talk of Constantine as a converted Christian in the conventional sense of the word, even though this is the picture painted in the main source for his life, Eusebius' *Life* (338–9). Constantine was not baptized until shortly before he died (although this was a common practice, with baptism delayed in the hope that the purified soul would be untouched by sin before death) and most of his advisers were not Christians. There is remarkably little mention of Christ in his recorded speeches (the *Oration to the Saints* of 324 or 325 is now accepted as an authentic exception) or decrees or awareness of Christian doctrine. There is no sign of any pagan opposition to his initiatives and this suggests that they were not seen as unduly provocative.

So one might see Constantine's attitude to Christianity as essentially pragmatic, the deliberate use of his victory at the Milvian Bridge as a platform from which to dismantle the structure of persecution and integrate the cohesive Christian communities in the service of the state. Alternatively his commitment may have been personal but he was reluctant to advertise it. He was certainly unwilling to follow those Christians who openly rejected paganism. No committed Christian could have supported the degree of toleration given to such cults by the Edict of Milan, and Constantine himself did not even abandon traditional worship. Towards the end of his reign he sanctioned the building of a large temple to his family on the Flaminian Way and it was to be endowed with theatrical shows and gladiatorial fights. Most

remarkable of all, Constantine continued to portray himself on coins and in the statues of himself used at the dedication of Constantinople as a sun god.

Moreover Constantine was never to allow the church to interfere in the way he exercised his rule. Tellingly Constantine once informed a group of bishops: 'You are bishops of those within the church, but I am perhaps a bishop appointed by God over those outside.' Many of his decrees were 'written in terms of a neutral monotheism which would be acceptable to Christians and pagans alike' (J. W. Liebeschuetz). (A recent description of Constantine as primarily a Roman, rather than Christian, emperor can be found in Raymond Van Dam, *The Roman Revolution of Constantine*, Cambridge, 2007.)

Whatever his motives Constantine's support for Christianity was crucial in establishing the religion's respectability and ensuring its continued spread. Not only could Christians now operate freely but in numerous ways Constantine gave them effective help. The clergy were relieved of any obligation to serve on city councils (a move which led to a mass of ordinations so onerous had these posts now become) and taxation. There was financial help for the building of churches and as bishops were now able to receive bequests some congregations became extremely wealthy. In Rome and Palestine the emperor and his family funded the first great Christian buildings. Constantine donated land from the old imperial palace of the Lateran to provide a cathedral for Rome, now St John Lateran, while on the Vatican hill a basilica (the traditional all-purpose hall of Roman public life now adapted to hold Christian congregations) was built over the supposed resting place of the apostle Peter. The first St Peter's, like St John Lateran, no longer survives but Rome still has two fine fifth-century examples of basilicas, those of Santa Maria Maggiore and Santa Sabina. The former is adorned by magnificent mosaics while the latter boasts a finely carved set of cypress-wood doors with panels showing the links between the Old and the New Testament, and one of the earliest known scenes of the crucifixion. Christ stands with his arms outstretched between the two thieves but there is no cross behind him. There were still inhibitions about proclaiming his degradation.

The martyrs were now given great prominence, their feast days dominated the church calendar, and their shrines became centres of pilgrimage. 'Where once long rest had hidden them from our gaze, they now blaze with light on a fitting pedestal and their gathered crown now blooms with joy... from all around the Christian people, young and old, flow in to see them, happy to tread the holy threshold, singing their praises and hailing with outstretched arms the Christian faith,' exulted Alexander, bishop of Theveste in north Africa. Meanwhile Helena, the mother of the emperor, visited Palestine in 326 and set in hand the building of appropriate memorials to the life of Jesus at Bethlehem and on the Mount of Olives. Constantine himself was responsible for the great Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem over the supposed burial place of Jesus. As early as 333 pilgrims (the so-called Bordeaux Pilgrim is the earliest recorded) were visiting these sacred places. Parts of the diary of a well-born Spanish nun, Egeria, survive from her visit of 384 and show that, with official help, even remote sites in Judaea, Egypt, and Galilee could be visited by those determined enough to do so.

In her diary Egeria left a description of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. 'The decorations really are too marvellous for words. All you can see is gold and jewels and silk... You simply cannot imagine the number and sheer weight of the candles, tapers, lamps and everything they use for services... They are beyond description, and so is the magnificent building itself...' There is 'gold, mosaic and precious marble, as much as his [Constantine's] empire can provide'. These great new buildings, with their fantastic decoration and aura of sanctity around the shrines of the martyrs, brought 'a Christianization of space' (in the words of the late Robert Markus). In theory God might be everywhere. In practice he now seemed especially close once a worshipper entered a church.

Until recently few books on church architecture have noted the radical reappraisal required to justify the glittering mosaics, the gold lamps, and the extravagant domes by a community which in earlier times had been described as 'a crowd lurking in corners shunning the light'. In his fine study *God and Gold in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1998), Dominic Janes has explored how the adaptation was made. Relevant texts were dug out from the Old Testament and, if further theological justification was needed, churches could be seen as pale imitations of what might be expected in heaven. (Here again the influence of Platonism was strong.) Most (but not all) bishops acquiesced in the wealth which came their way and some, like Ambrose of Milan, revelled in the opportunity to create their own vast buildings. The abrupt shift to opulence, however, left its tensions. Well might the ascetic scholar Jerome complain of how 'parchments are dyed purple, gold is melted into lettering, manuscripts are dressed up as jewels, while Christ lies at the door naked and dying'.

Few churches, of course, enjoyed the magnificence of the basilicas of the capitals of the empire. The three rooms found at the villa at Livingstone in Britain must have been more typical. Christians were still in a minority in every part of the empire even though the support of the emperor had led, in the words of Eusebius, 'to the hypocrisy of people who crept into the church' to win his favour. Moreover individual churches still enjoyed a large degree of independence and there was no effective way of settling doctrinal and other disputes between them. To this extent Christianity was still not a coherent force in Roman society. This was to change as successive emperors took the lead in consolidating a unified church. (The great scholar of late antiquity, Peter Brown, cautions that the use of the word 'Church' is misguided as it overlooks the independence of each church from each other and the diversity of Christianity even centuries after the fall of Rome. Perhaps it can only be used when the medieval Roman Catholic Church is in place.)

The Arian Controversy

Christianity had taken different forms in the different cultural niches in which it settled. By granting tax exemptions and other privileges to 'Christian' clergy, Constantine and his successors laid themselves open to petitions for exemption from a mass of different communities all claiming to be Christian. This meant that the

state, anxious to control its tax base, was impelled to take the leading role in defining a Christian orthodoxy. As early as 313 Constantine had to decide which of two rival Christian churches in north Africa to privilege. One, the Donatists, so called from one of their bishops, Donatus, claimed to be the 'true' church as they had stood firm against all persecution. Their rivals were made up of Christian communities that had buckled under persecution but had then asked for readmittance to the church. Constantine handed the dispute over to a committee of bishops although he sat in on their proceedings. The Donatists were condemned and the emperor confirmed the condemnation when they protested. The pragmatic Constantine preferred to work through the more flexible communities that had compromised themselves with the state rather than with the rigid and anti-imperialist Donatists, but this was the moment when the independence of the Christian communities was challenged by the state. Constantine even initiated persecution of the Donatists, only relenting in 321. The Donatists survived as a vigorous church in north Africa until destroyed by their fellow Christians in the early fifth century. (The divisive and bitter antagonism is covered in detail by Brent Shaw in his *Sacred Violence*, New York and Cambridge, 2011.)

The Donatist controversy had not been a doctrinal dispute but in the 320s, as Constantine became ruler over the eastern empire with its much higher proportion of Christians, another major issue arose among the churches which certainly was. It concerned the relationship of Christ to God the Father. The question hinged on whether Christ had been part of God from the beginning of time or whether he had been created by him at a later date and with a distinct substance. The latter 'subordinationist' view, which had substantial support from earlier Christian tradition, Origen and Tertullian, for example, and the Gospels ('My Father is greater than I', John 14: 28), was eloquently argued by one Arius, a priest in Alexandria. The slogan of the Arians was 'There was [a time] when he [the *Logos*] was not.' Christ, in this tradition, occupied an indeterminate position somewhere between the creator and what had been created, neither fully god nor fully man. It has to be stressed that Arius was a spokesman rather than the initiator of new ideas and that the term 'Arianism' is often applied to a range of 'subordinationist' ideas that he had never personally endorsed. (Arius has traditionally been treated with vituperation by orthodox Christians. A more sensitive approach is taken by Rowan Williams, *Arius, Heresy and Tradition*, revised edition, Grand Rapids, Mich., 2002.)

The issue was brought to the front when Arius was challenged by his bishop, Alexander, who argued an alternative view, that the Son had existed eternally and that there was no separate act of creation. (The rival slogan was 'Always the God, always the Son'.) The dispute was complex and the divisions between the two sides crudely exaggerated by later orthodox Christians after the condemnation of Arianism by imperial edict in 380 (see below). So far as the theology was concerned, the church certainly provided no satisfactory way of creating a terminology that could encompass one view acceptable to all. Yet Constantine was concerned that such issues threatened his dreams of the church as a stable support for his rule and, having failed to cow the factions into silence, he took the initiative in convening a

council of bishops in order to reconcile the opposing groups. It was eventually to meet at Nicaea, near to Constantine's eastern base at Nicomedia (Constantinople was still under construction), so that the emperor could attend in person.

The council of Nicaea, 325, was the first great ecumenical ('of the whole world') council of the church with 220 bishops in attendance, most of them from the east where the dispute was most intense. (The bishop of Rome, still on the margins of the largely Greek-speaking Christian world, did not appear.) The details of the council are obscure but it seems that it was Constantine himself who urged the declaration that Christ was 'consubstantial, of one substance, with the Father', in effect a condemnation of Arius' view. Constantine's aim was clearly to achieve an end to the dispute—he never showed any interest in the minutiae of doctrinal squabbles—and, in the short term, he was successful. Only Arius and two bishops opposed the resolution. There was, however, an unhappy sequel to their opposition. Constantine used his imperial powers to exile the two bishops, the first indication that an emperor, with all the influence at his disposal, had assumed responsibility for upholding Christian doctrine. In fact the issue was unresolved, perhaps inevitably owing to its nature. 'Arianism', in effect any view which accepted the subordination of the Son to the Father, remained strong in the eastern empire and Constantine himself, in what seems to have been his overriding concern, to maintain the unity of Christianity, made no further move to condemn it. He even showed personal sympathy towards Arians and in fact his own baptism was carried out by an Arian bishop.

The Founding of Constantinople

After his victory at the Milvian Bridge, Constantine was prepared to recognize Licinius as Augustus in the east. The joint meeting at Milan that saw the issue of the Edict of Toleration was followed by a marriage alliance. Licinius married Constantine's half-sister and each couple had sons whom they agreed to declare Caesars. Dynasticism was back but Constantine was ambitious that his family should prevail over that of his rival. He exploited the differences with Licinius so effectively that war broke out between them. Licinius was allowed to survive a first defeat in 317 but with his territory in the east truncated. This unstable and unsatisfactory arrangement lasted until 324 when Licinius was defeated again (and died a year later) and so Constantine became sole emperor.

Ostensibly the city of Constantinople, the city that would be capital of the Byzantine empire for over a thousand years, was founded to commemorate Constantine's victory but a powerful motive must have been the need to create a base from which the defence of the empire in the east could be directed. The centuries-old Greek town of Byzantium, on a promontory overlooking the Bosphorus, was an ideal site. It was relatively close to both the Danube and Euphrates borders. There were excellent road communications both to east and west (though those in the west were vulnerable to disruption by invasion). In the Golden Horn it had a superb harbour.

The city had always controlled access to and from the Bosphorus and so could be supplied by sea.

The Tetrarchic capitals with their palaces and adjoining hippodromes provided one model for the city, but a mass of statuary was looted from the Greek world (as it had been for Rome by earlier conquerors) and Constantine's creation of a second senate and the provision of a free grain supply for its inhabitants (much of which came from Egypt) also suggested that this was more than just a subsidiary capital. As in Rome, there were seven 'hills', stretching back westwards from the core of the city, and, like Rome, Constantinople was given fourteen administrative districts. The city's hippodrome was directly modelled on the Circus Maximus in Rome and it was in its imperial box that Constantine, weighted with precious stones, displayed himself at the city's inauguration in 330. Yet, in recognition of Aeneas and the founding of Rome, the city also echoed back to nearby Troy—its most prestigious (now vanished) baths, the Baths of Zeuxippos, were decorated with scenes from the Trojan legends. Yet one can hardly avoid the impression that the self-glorification of Constantine ranked high among the motives for the city's foundation—a great statue of the emperor, with the rays of the sun emanating from his head, stood on a column in his Forum. Constantine spent much of his time in his new capital until his death in 337.

Interestingly Constantine gave low priority to the building of churches in Constantinople and it is possible that one motive for building the city was to retain its founder's independence from the ancient Christian bishoprics. The only church completed by Constantine's death, that of the Holy Apostles, was his own mausoleum where he had himself buried as no less than 'the thirteenth apostle.' This somewhat provocative nomination provides further evidence of an emperor determined to maintain his own interpretation of his favoured religion. Even late in life Constantine kept his links with paganism. Coins issued on his death show him being welcomed into heaven with the same imagery as his pagan predecessors while the first 'Christian' churches in the city were dedicated to 'Wisdom' (the great Santa Sophia, still surviving today in its sixth-century form) and 'Peace' (*Eirene*), terminology acceptable to both Christians and pagans. The emergence of Constantinople as a predominantly Christian capital, a 'Second Jerusalem' according to some texts, only took place in the fifth century.

Constantine's Successors and the Problems of Defence

When Constantine died in 337 he left three sons to succeed him. All three were Christians. Constantine II took the west of the empire, Constantius the east, and the central provinces of Africa, Illyricum, and Italy went to the youngest, Constans. To secure their position they eliminated many of their close relatives but when, in 340, Constantine invaded Italy in the hope of adding it to his share he too was killed. Constans died in his turn in 350 after a successful coup by a usurper, Magnentius. The following year Constantius and Magnentius met in the great Battle of

Mursa (in today's Croatia) where Magnentius was defeated but both armies suffered enormous losses. 'Thus perished', wrote the historian Eutropius, 'large forces that could have conquered any enemy and assured the security of the empire.' After the battle the Alamanni who had been recruited by Constantius to help him went on the rampage in Gaul.

The truth was that the fundamental problems of the empire, the threats from outsiders from north and east and the instability of leadership, remained. Constantius ruled as sole emperor until his death in 361 and proved a conscientious ruler and commander but did not have the flair and charisma to galvanize the empire's defence. For much of his reign he was preoccupied in the east where the Sasanian king Shapur II was energetically raiding into Mesopotamia. This meant that the northern borders of the empire were neglected and Gaul, in particular, was frequently ravaged. For the first time the Germans were able to take cities. The Gauls only enjoyed some respite when a young cousin of Constantius, Julian, nominated by him as Caesar and given the charge of Gaul in 355, surprised everyone by proving a highly effective commander. Both the Franks and the Alamanni suffered major defeats at his hands. By 360 order had been restored to the borders and Roman forces were stationed along them.

Constantius, still hard pressed in the east, now tried to remove some of Julian's troops. They revolted and declared Julian an Augustus (360). Despite a half-hearted plea of loyalty to Constantius, Julian was ambitious enough to seize his chance and he was soon heading east. It was by coincidence that Constantius died before the rivals could meet in battle and Julian found himself sole emperor by default. Julian was the last of the pagan emperors and he attempted to re-establish the traditional cults of the empire (see below). However, he was only to survive eighteen months before dying at the hands of an unknown, but probably enemy, assailant in 363 while on retreat from an ill-judged campaign into Persian territory.

Julian's successor was a Christian army officer, Jovian, who, caught in enemy territory, was forced into a humiliating surrender of border territory to the Sasanians. The advantageous position on the eastern frontier long held by the Romans was lost and this was a significant moment in the weakening of the empire. Jovian died on the way back to Constantinople. The army now chose Valentinian, a native of Pannonia, as the new emperor. Valentinian (emperor 364–75) was perhaps the last of the 'great' emperors. He was a tough man, often brutal, and completely intolerant of any challenges to his authority, but a fine soldier. He fought with success along the northern borders while at the same time quelling revolts in Britain and Africa. Archaeological evidence shows that he undertook a systematic programme of fort construction along the Rhine and Danube and on the main roads leading inland from the borders. For perhaps the last time the borders of the empire were effectively defended. Valentinian shared power with his inexperienced and much weaker brother Valens, whom he installed in the east of the empire.

The problems in assessing the size and competence of the Roman army in the fourth century are immense. There appears to have been a greater dependence on cavalry units and stronger defence installations on the frontiers but the overall size

of the forces may not have been much larger than it was under Septimius Severus. If the number of laws relating to army service are an indication, there seems to have been difficulty in finding a flow of recruits ready to spend much of their adult lives away from their home communities. One trend was to recruit more troops from across the borders and this is attested by the increasing number of officers with Germanic rather than Roman names. How far these were truly committed to the maintenance of the empire is impossible to know but the strains were clearly beginning to show. The defeat of Valens by the Goths in 378 (see below) may not have been fatal but was symptomatic of an empire losing its cohesion. (See the discussions in chapter 5 of Simon James, *Rome and the Sword*, London, 2011, and David Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay, AD 180–395*, Oxford and New York, 2004, 448–59.)

Ammianus Marcellinus

The details of the period 354 to 378 are so well known because they are covered by one of the finest of the Roman historians, Ammianus Marcellinus (330–c.395). Ammianus was Greek by birth, a native of Antioch, but he provides a good example of how the empire had imbued Greeks with loyalty to a Roman ideal. Having served with the Roman army he spent the last years of his life in Rome and wrote in Latin. He was nostalgic for the earlier days of Rome, contrasting the frugal habits of the early republic with the decadence of the grandees he observed around him in the city. His descriptions of their wealth and alleged corruption and their passage through the streets surrounded by a mass of slaves are among the most evocative portraits in his work.

Ammianus' history began in AD 96, the date at which Tacitus' history had ended. However, all the early books are lost. Those that survive (from 354) are based on personal experience and contemporary evidence and provide by far the best non-Christian perspective on an empire that was preoccupied with political survival. Ammianus' work is remarkable at many levels, quite beyond the wealth of detail it provides. He can create, as Tacitus could, the atmosphere of terror emanating from a man who had absolute power, and, in the closing chapters of his work, he explains the feelings of impotence engendered by the hordes of 'barbarians' who swept into the empire before the cataclysmic defeat of the Roman armies at Adrianople in 378 (see below).

Ammianus' world, therefore, is one where pressures crowd on those in power and their reactions are often vicious in return. He notes how corruption spreads from the top down during the reign of Constantius, for whom he had a particular aversion. In Pannonia one of the prefects, Probus, attempted to ingratiate himself with the emperor by gathering taxes with such force that the poor were sometimes reduced to suicide while the rich moved to escape his depredations. This is the picture which has survived of the fourth century in general, one in which Roman rule became increasingly tyrannical. Whether it is the full truth is difficult to say. As has

been suggested in earlier chapters, Roman rule had always been weighted towards the elites at the expense of the poor with little mercy shown for those who offended the state, but the reports of brutality of superiors in the bureaucracy against their inferiors that Ammianus relates are certainly new.

The Imperial Administration

In the second century the administration of the empire had been carried out by the provincial governors and their staff, a few hundred in all. By the fourth century government had become something very different. A mass of office holders had been created around the emperor himself, who now enjoyed being the centre of a court. The expansion began under Constantine who seems to have been anxious to reward potential opponents with posts and titles that he arranged in a hierarchy of grades. The administration grew steadily from there. One estimate is that there were 30,000 to 35,000 officials by the late fourth century. Now that urban life was in atrophy and the *decuriones* ever less willing to give patronage to their cities, government office became the most certain way of achieving status. The competition for these posts encouraged the buying and selling of offices and the emergence of new patterns of patronage as those with power and influence exercised them on behalf of dependants. As the administration became more complex and many officials distant from the eye of the emperor corruption also appears to have spread. A letter sent by Licinius to a provincial assembly in 317 orders that any *decurion* who tries to evade city service by gaining an imperial post through 'venal patronage' shall be sacked.

The proliferation of official posts at the centre of the administration placed an even greater focus on the emperor. There was a paradox here. Just as the emperor had become in theory a semi-divine figure with almost absolute power, the post itself increasingly became the plaything of the soldiers. Julian, Jovian, and Valentinian all owed their elevation to the army. Emperors tried to secure their sons as their successors, appointing them as Caesars or even Augusti when they were still small, but it was hard to sustain a dynasty against pretenders or strong men who ruled from behind the throne. Insofar as the survival of the empire rested with energetic and talented emperors who were capable of mobilizing resources and men in its defence, it depended to a large degree on chance.

These weaknesses have traditionally been seen as among the causes of the fall of the empire in the century to come. However, it can hardly be said that the government of the fourth century lacked vigour. A mass of legislation survives, much of which tries to freeze the subjects of the empire into their role as taxpayers. Entry to those positions that carried tax exemption—the clergy, civil service, and even the army—was restricted and in many occupations sons were required to follow their fathers rather than escape elsewhere. Tenant farmers (*coloni*) were increasingly tied to the land and if they did move to other estates the landowner became liable for their poll tax. In extreme cases the *coloni* may have been little different from the slaves who still existed in large numbers. Vigorous the government may have been

but reports suggest that administration was riven by internal conflicts and rivalries and that Constantius, in particular, encouraged these tensions to keep his own position intact.

If there was an area where the state was losing control it was over the traditional elites. These city elites were already under strain, a strain intensified by the growth of the court as an alternative focus for able men. The state tried desperately to keep them in place. As the empire became Christian the morale of those cities that remained pagan was undermined, especially as the bishops were able to exploit their privileged position. As one pagan notable lamented: 'All the temples that are in the city will fall, the religion of the town will cease, our enemies will rise against us, our town will perish and all this great honour which you see will pass away.' Other potential centres of resistance were among the large landowners whose position in the west strengthened in the fourth century. The old senatorial class living around Rome was especially powerful now that the western emperors tended to be based in Milan. They preserved a mannered way of living, maintaining their relationships with each other through gifts and other courtesies and sustaining the traditional pagan cults of the city. There is much evidence that from the middle of the fourth century they were evading taxes and so depriving the state of desperately needed resources. This evasion is one reason why the state became increasingly dependent on barbarian forces in the century that followed (see Chapter 33).

The evidence for the overall prosperity of the empire is ambiguous. The church (helped by tax exemptions and the renunciation of wealth in its favour by aristocrats who espoused asceticism) and many landowners in the west certainly became richer. The cities of north Africa were flourishing while the villa estates of Britain enjoyed their greatest period of opulence. (Most of the surviving mosaics from Roman Britain date from this century.) However, there is also a mass of evidence complaining of the weight of taxation and traditionally a picture has been painted of an empire groaning under the oppressive demands of tax collectors and soldiers. Yet this may be the result of better sources and voices not heard before at last having their say.

Pressures on the Borders

The problem, in fact, was probably not so much lack of the will to survive on the part of the government as the continued pressures of these invaders. The ongoing wars with the Sasanians were manageable in the sense that Sasanian Persia was a centralized state that could be negotiated with, although there were other factors involved, including the ambitions of leaders on both sides, which prevented peace. However, there was no easy way to control the northern borders of the empire. Valentinian had managed to preserve the frontiers but had died suddenly in 375, from an apoplectic fit brought on when negotiating with some intransigent Germans. His successor, his son Gratian whom he had made an Augustus when only 8, was now 16. (The troops also declared Valentinian's 4-year-old son, another Valentinian, as

Augustus. Not for the first time there was a clash here between the needs of the empire for strong rulers and the determination of those emperors in power to maintain a dynasty.) Gratian and his co-emperor, his uncle Valens, now faced a massive incursion of Goths, as a hitherto unknown people, the Huns, appeared from the east. The Huns were nomadic peoples who, for some reason, possibly major economic changes in the steppes of central Asia, had been forced into migration. Ammianus is at his best as he describes this 'wild race moving without encumbrances and consumed by a savage passion to pillage the property of others.' The Goths were pushed helplessly towards the boundaries of the empire and soon a mass of refugees was struggling to cross the Danube.

Faced with this incursion Valens saw it as an opportunity to recruit men for the overstretched Roman armies. However, far from organizing the recruitment in an orderly way, local soldiers treated the new arrivals with contempt. There were reports of Roman officers offering the Goths' leaders dogs for food in return for the surrender of their men as slaves. The Goths were outraged, broke free from Roman control, and were soon rampaging through Thrace. Valens had to march from Constantinople to subdue them, but at the Battle of Adrianople, 9 August 378, the Romans were caught by an overpowering mass of armed Goths. Hemmed in on all sides they lost the ability to manoeuvre, traditionally an effective part of Roman strategy. Two-thirds of the Roman army, possibly 10,000 of its best troops, died in the humiliating defeat. Valens fell among them.

This humiliation is often seen as a turning point in the history of the empire, the moment when the Romans finally lost the initiative against the invaders. This may be an exaggeration. The armies had been under pressure for decades and the defeat at Adrianople may have been no more than one further step in a steady process of the weakening of the empire. However, a significant development in the relationships between Romans and barbarians now took place. Gratian appointed an efficient Spanish general, Theodosius, to succeed Valens and, in 382, Theodosius signed a treaty with the Goths under which they were allowed to settle in the empire, in Thrace, in return for providing troops for the Roman armies. Their position was to be one of privilege. They were to be exempt from taxation and able to serve under their own leaders. There were precedents for such compromises but this was the first time that an area within the borders of the empire had been passed out of effective Roman control. Within a few years the Goths were to be once again on the move, causing havoc as they searched for new land (see below, p. 630 ff.).

Gratian was killed in 383 when fighting a western usurper, Maximus. His younger brother Valentinian emerged as his successor. Theodosius tolerated Maximus until the latter invaded Italy, forcing Valentinian to flee. Theodosius rushed westwards and defeated and killed him at Aquileia in 388. Valentinian was pushed aside and, in effect, Theodosius was now sole emperor until his death in 395. It was then that the empire was divided between his two sons, Arcadius in the east and Honorius in the west. It was never to be reunited.

The Search for Theological Consensus

Despite the support of Constantine the church was still relatively weak. Constantine's sons, though Christian, had continued to tolerate paganism. (Historians still use the word 'paganism' as a general term for non-Christian beliefs but they do so with marked unease. The connotations attached to the word unfairly degrade a broad range of beliefs, many of which were highly sophisticated.) They still held the traditional title of *pontifex maximus* and subsidized pagan temples. A law of 342 prohibited the destruction of temples so as to protect the traditional entertainments and 'the celebration of ancient pleasures' associated with them. Constantius had as many pagans in his administration as the pagan Julian did some twenty years later.

It was only in the 350s that Constantius launched a determined attack on those who 'offered sacrifice or cultivated the images of the [pagan] gods'. An edict against the practice of divination followed—emperors were always wary of those prepared to predict their successors. However, even this campaign had its limits. When Constantius visited Rome in 357 (in one of his most famous passages Ammianus describes how the emperor struggled to maintain his self-control when faced for the first time with the magnificence of the city), he realized the persistent strength of paganism there and refrained from upsetting the privileges of the senators and the revenues of their temples. Although paganism in late fourth-century Rome was not as vibrant as used to be believed, archaeological evidence shows that temples in Rome were being restored as late as the 380s.

The church was also in some confusion. After the stage-managed outcome of the Nicene Council, there was increasing recognition that the formula of consubstantiality (expressed by the Greek word *homoousios*) had no backing from the scriptures and went against earlier teaching. Like his father, Constantius was determined to achieve an agreed creed around which he could group the Christian communities, and he called together bishops from east and west in two separate councils in 359. Participants from each of these eventually met together in one assembly in Constantinople the following year, 360. The debates of 359 and 360 were muddled and bitter but the emperor himself did nothing to achieve a settlement. Ammianus Marcellinus puts it well when he opined that Constantius 'confounded the plain and simple doctrine of the Christians with absurd superstition, in which, by involved discussions rather than efforts at agreement, he aroused more controversies'.

Eventually Constantius secured a somewhat unstable consensus for a compromise creed in which Jesus was declared to be *homoios*, 'like' the Father, with the Nicene term *homoousios* specifically condemned on the grounds that 'it was not familiar to the masses, caused disturbance and because the Scriptures do not contain it'. This certainly reflected the artificial nature of the Nicene creed imposed by Constantine in 325 but it was hardly a more sustainable alternative, especially as Constantius never gained the immense prestige among Christians that his father had enjoyed. (The best account of the theological debates of these years is to be found in R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318–381 AD*, Edinburgh, 1988.)

The settlement of 360 was also threatened by Constantius' successor Julian. Julian had been brought up a Christian but the elimination of most of his immediate relations by Christian emperors had shaken him. He was further disillusioned by the Christian infighting over doctrine. 'Experience', wrote Ammianus Marcellinus, 'had taught him that no wild beasts are so dangerous to man as Christians are to one another.' So he 'converted' back to paganism. As the orator Libanius put it in a panegyric to the emperor: 'You quickly threw aside your error [Christianity], released yourself from darkness and grasped truth instead of ignorance, reality in place of falsehood, our old gods in place of that wicked one and his rites.' From now on, Julian proclaimed, Christians were to confine their teachings to their churches.

Julian was an intellectual, a philosopher emperor whose opposition to Christianity rested as much on a rejection of its teachings as on his personal experience of it as a faith torn by dissension. He mounted a powerful critique of Christian belief in his *Contra Galilaeos* (362–3), where he analysed the scriptures for contradictions. He argued instead that a diverse empire needed a diverse set of gods to represent its many different cultures and traditions. (He followed this through by encouraging the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem although, to the joy of the Christians, this support for Judaism was halted by a major fire.) However, it was one thing for Julian to dissect the scriptures, it was another to find a stable alternative around which to rally the empire. His own presence lacked the dignity expected of an emperor—he often seemed distant and self-absorbed when in public—while his religious ideas appeared complex and incoherent, a mixture of sophisticated philosophy with a personal enthusiasm for pagan sacrifices, at a time when many pagans had rejected them. Fascinating though he remains, Julian was not able to reverse the growth of Christianity.

With Jovian came a restoration of Christian privilege and there were to be no more pagan emperors. The church was able to resume its progress. Increasingly its influence was based on the emergence of strong bishoprics headed by men of character and power. The church had acquired great wealth, mostly in land donated by the faithful, while the bishops had been given rights of jurisdiction (they could order the release of slaves, for instance) and often had an important role in the distribution of alms. Administrative expertise was essential. For this reason bishops were normally chosen from the traditional ruling classes and in some cases were appointed even before they were baptized. (For the emergence of the

bishops in this period see Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition*, Berkeley and London, 2005, and Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire*, Madison, 1992.)

One such was Ambrose, bishop of Milan from 374 to 397 and perhaps the most influential bishop and preacher of his age. Ambrose had been an effective governor of north Italy and, when there was some dispute over the succession to the bishopric of Milan, he was asked to be bishop. Once baptized, he quickly mastered his new role, adopted the Nicene creed, despite the *homoios* settlement of 360, and showed he was much more than an administrator. In the twenty-four tempestuous years of his rule he waged an outspoken campaign against moral laxity, heresy (especially Arianism), and paganism. The council he held in the basilica at Aquileia in 381 was a superbly stage-managed condemnation of the Arian bishops summoned to attend apparently as equals but then browbeaten into submission. (The debates of these decades are normally assumed to be about 'Arianism'. That convention is followed here but many of the anti-Nicene ideas had nothing specific to do with Arius, who was, in any case, essentially a spokesman for 'subordinationist' ideas that were widespread in his day.)

Ambrose insisted that it was the church that should define orthodoxy and set the standards of morality and that it was the duty of the state to act in support. He first worked on the young Gratian, inducing him to surrender the post of *pontifex maximus*. His *cause célèbre* was his battle with the Roman senate over the statue of Victory that adorned the senate house in Rome. Gratian was persuaded to order its removal despite opposition from the pagan senators. Ambrose was also important in encouraging the cult of relics. Having found the supposed bodies of two martyrs, Protasius and Gervasius, in 386, he exposed the remains in his own cathedral but also distributed parts of them to others he wished to impress. 'Blood and earth' from the two were sent as a gift to his fellow bishop, Victricius, at Rouen while 'dust' soaked in the martyrs' blood was dispatched to bishop Gaudentius of nearby Brescia. This was the old practice of gift relationships extended to the Christian world. It helped that the spiritual power of a fragment of a martyr's bone was assumed to have the power of the whole. Soon churches were building up their own impressive collections of dust and bone fragments. (Ambrose's initiatives are covered in Neil McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital*, Berkeley and London, 1994.)

After Julian's death the arguments over the relationship between Jesus the Son and God the Father that Constantius had failed to settle had revived. The continuing debates were embittered by the lack of any secure foundation on which they could rest. Scripture, tradition, the teachings of rival schools of theology, and Greek philosophy could never be brought into consensus. In the western empire there was general sympathy for a united Godhead of Father and Son on the Nicene model. In the east debate was more vigorous and varied so that, in an age when theological debate was still free to flourish, there was a spectrum of 'Arian' views from those, followers of the radical Eunomius, who stressed that Father and Son were 'unlike'

each other, to those who believed that they were 'like in substance', 'of similar substance', to (at the other extreme from Eunomius) the Nicene formula that Father and Son were 'of the same substance'. Valens (emperor of the east, 364–78) had tolerated this debate so long as good order was maintained but enthusiasts for Nicaea branded him 'an Arian' and they explained his defeat and death at Adrianople as punishment from God for this tolerance of heresy.

The most impassioned champion of the Nicene cause in the east (cf. Ambrose in the west) was Athanasius (c.298–373), the intransigent and tempestuous bishop of Alexandria. However, Athanasius' attacks on the Arians depended more on invective than on reasoned thought. More impressive intellectual backing for Nicaea came from the works of the three theologians from Cappadocia, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa, the so-called Nicene Fathers. All three were steeped in traditional philosophy—Basil of Caesarea argued that one had to absorb it before progressing to the study of the scriptures—and they were masters of argument. While Nicaea had only provided a formula for the consubstantiality of Father and Son (with only a reference to the Holy Spirit), the Nicene Fathers integrated the Holy Spirit in a Trinity in which three persons, God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, shared a common substance without losing their distinct personalities.

If there was to be any resolution of the varying approaches to the relationship between Father and Son it could not be made without the support of the emperor. It was Theodosius I who decided to back a revised Nicene creed. He had absorbed the Nicene tradition from his Spanish background and had been baptized when seriously ill by a Nicene-supporting bishop. In January 380, just after his elevation as emperor of the east, Theodosius issued an edict ordering all to believe 'in the single deity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost under the concept of equal majesty and of the Holy Trinity'. Those who did not accede to this formula were judged to be 'demented and insane' and would 'carry the infamy of heretical dogmas'. They would be subject to the vengeance of God and the hostility of the state. Like the Nicene Fathers Theodosius had gone further than Nicaea by integrating the Holy Ghost into a Trinity but he had also, for the first time in the history of the empire, highlighted specific beliefs that were to be outlawed.

Having made a grand entrance into Constantinople in November 380, Theodosius set about summoning bishops whom he knew were sympathetic to his formula to a council which would meet the next year, 381. Some 150, all from the east (as Theodosius had no jurisdiction in the west), assembled. The proceedings were once again tempestuous (and the presiding bishop, Gregory of Nazianzus, now bishop of Constantinople, forced to resign) but the formula was accepted and all alternatives banned. The 'demented and insane' 'Arians' were ordered out of their churches. Among the losers were the 'barbarian' peoples who had been converted to Christianity at a time when Arianism was dominant and who now found themselves classed as heretics. The proclamation of the Council that Constantinople, an upstart in the hierarchy of Christian cities, was now second only to Rome underlined the essentially political nature of Theodosius' settlement. The ancient Christian cities of Antioch and Alexandria were profoundly hurt.

It is possible that Theodosius' support for the creed was part of a deliberate policy of consolidating an 'orthodox' empire against 'heretical' 'barbarians' but emperors were also uneasy about emphasizing the humanity of Jesus as one who had been executed by a Roman governor as a 'King of the Jews' and thus a rival to the emperor. (Witness the shouting of the crowds in Thessalonika: 'These men all act against the edicts of Caesar saying there is another king, Jesus' (Acts of the Apostles 17: 7).) An elevation of Jesus into the Godhead helped avoid the issue. More importantly the definition of 'heresies' in the 380s was a turning point in the history of Christian theology. Never before had a division between orthodox and non-orthodox been so rigidly defined and, what is more, enforced through Roman law. The Council of Constantinople was later proclaimed an ecumenical council despite being a stage-managed assembly of eastern bishops already committed to Nicaea. Theodosius' pivotal role in initiating the process was airbrushed from the Christian record. (See Charles Freeman, *AD 381: Heretics, Pagans and the Christian State*, London, 2008.)

The Consolidation of Christian Imperialism

When Theodosius moved to the west in 388 to confront Maximus, he encountered Ambrose in Milan. Ambrose was soon on the offensive. Theodosius had condemned a Christian community at Callinicum on the Euphrates who had sacked a Jewish synagogue. He had ordered restitution. Ambrose insisted that he should not restore a building where Christ was denied and Theodosius retracted his order. When the emperor appeared to have initiated or condoned a massacre of some rioters in Thessalonika in 390, Ambrose threatened to excommunicate him and took the credit for forcing him to repent. (Although Theodosius' acquiescence may well have been a calculated public relations exercise, the incident was later exploited by popes as a precedent for the primacy of the church over the state.)

So Theodosius became a Christian emperor of the type desired by Ambrose. It was in his reign that a wide variety of further heresies were defined and, probably at the instigation of his fanatical *magister officiorum*, Flavius Rufinus, a vigorous onslaught launched against pagan cults in a series of laws from the early 390s. It was now that the games at Olympia ceased after nearly 1,200 years. In Egypt bands of fanatical monks wrecked the ancient temples. The Serapeum, near Alexandria, one of the great temple complexes of the ancient world, was torn apart in 391. In north Africa Christian vigilantes raided pagan centres and ridiculed traditional beliefs. Intolerance towards Jews was given some official backing by the Callinicum episode and further inflamed by Christian preachers such as John Chrysostom. By the beginning of the fifth century Jews were banned from the civil service. In a masterly funeral oration for Theodosius in Milan in 395 Ambrose told his listeners that there was no doubt that such a committed Christian emperor 'enjoys everlasting light and eternal tranquillity' with God.

So new relationships between the churches and the imperial state were being forged. When Hilary, bishop of Poitiers and one of the more formidable supporters

of the Nicene cause, was asked his views on the emperors, he replied that 'he [the emperor] does not bring you [the Christian bishops] liberty by casting you in prison, but [now] treats you with respect within his palace and makes you his slave'. Despite Ambrose's apparent triumph over Theodosius, the church had now become the servant of the state in a way that many Christians, such as Hilary, deplored. Bishops were increasingly used by the state to keep order and the benefits offered for acquiescence in this role were many. It was Ammianus Marcellinus who talked of the bishops of Rome as 'enriched by the gifts of matrons, they ride in carriages, dress splendidly and outdo kings in the lavishness of their table', even though it was precisely this opulence that drove many bishops to reassert their moral authority through charitable building programmes (as with the complex of leper colonies built by Basil of Caesarea) or personal austerity. In his *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Hanover, NH, 2002), Peter Brown sets out the way in which the bishops recognized the needs of 'the poor' (a theme Brown develops in much greater detail in his *Through the Eye of the Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550, AD*, Princeton and London, 2012).

However, what resources were offered the poor were minuscule compared to those lavished on the gold and mosaic within the churches. The aristocratic Melania the Younger may have renounced her wealth but she gave so many 'offerings of both gold and silver treasure and valuable silk veils' to adorn a church in impoverished Thagaste in north Africa that churches in neighbouring cities were impelled to compete (as they had done with their civic buildings in the more prosperous years of the second century). Meanwhile in Rome, pope Sixtus II (432–40), with support from the emperor, built the imposing basilica of Santa Mary Maggiore on the Esquiline Hill, so extending papal influence into one of the residential enclaves of the aristocracy. One of its superb original mosaics celebrates the triumph of the papacy while Sixtus lavished the basilica with gold plate including a wine jug weighing twelve pounds. (The link between Santa Maria Maggiore and gold persisted—its ceiling was coated in the sixteenth century with the earliest gold to come in from South America.) With time a more formal system of distribution of a church's income was standardized. The bishop could take a quarter of all income for himself, another quarter was allocated to his clergy, another quarter to the upkeep of church buildings, and the remaining quarter was distributed among 'the poor', although who exactly qualified as 'the poor' was not easy to resolve. (See again the exhaustive study by Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of the Needle*, cited above.)

In many ways the church adopted attitudes that were supportive of traditional values and customs. Constantine's victory at the Milvian Bridge had raised the possibility that the Christian God sanctioned success in war. By the late 370s, Ambrose was able to declare that 'the army is led not by military eagles or the flight of birds but by your name, Lord Jesus, and Your Worship'. Remarkably, Jesus who, of course, had in reality been crucified by Roman soldiers, is portrayed as one in the Archiepiscopal chapel in Ravenna (c.500). Depictions of Christ in Majesty—the earliest is in the late fourth-century church of Santa Pudenziana in Rome—show him displayed as an emperor or even the God Jupiter might be. The result was a tension in

the Christian tradition, between those who saw Christianity essentially as part of the natural conservative order of things and those who were inspired by the Gospels to reject worldly status and power. (A study which concentrates primarily on the way that Christians formulated new approaches to society is Averil Cameron's *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, Berkeley and London, 1991.)

The Last Pagans?

If one reads the letters of Jerome, the bitter sermons of John Chrysostom, or the accounts of destruction of 'pagan' temples in the east, one gets the impression of the church on the offensive. Similarly traditional accounts tell of a powerful pagan fight back against Christianity especially from the ancient senatorial families of Rome. The moment of their destruction is seen as the Battle of Frigidus (see below, p. 627). Recent scholarship is providing a more nuanced account of the relationship between Christian and pagan especially within Rome itself. The work that has transformed our understanding is Alan Cameron's *The Last Pagans of Rome* (Oxford, 2010). Cameron is, of course, talking only about Rome although its elite held estates and thus power across the empire. He argues that there was never a strong pagan party in the city and that the 'conversion' of the pagans in the late fourth century was actually to maintain status. 'It was now the church people were flocking to, and if the nobility was going to maintain its position, they too had to join the church, where their wealth and connections enabled them to maintain their traditional ascendancy... Roman paganism petered out with a whimper rather than a bang.'

It is worth asking, in fact, exactly what separated the ordinary Christian from his pagan counterpart. There was a broad stretch of shared territory. Christians, sometimes to the despair of their bishops (Augustine notable among them), continued to take part in pagan celebrations, attend the games, and indulge in traditional superstitions. Ambrose condemned Christians who continued to celebrate pagan banqueting rituals around the tombs of their loved ones. In the 440s pope Leo I is found denouncing a group of 'Christians' whom he found worshipping the sun from the steps of St Peter's. There is no evidence that Christian marriage customs were any different from pagan ones. The text on the tomb of the pagan senator Prætextus describes his wife Paulina as 'partner of my heart, nurse of modesty, bond of chastity, pure love and loyalty produced in heaven... united by the pact of consecration, by the yoke of the marriage vow and perfect harmony', a description of a happy marriage as much Christian as pagan.

Slavery continued as much in Christian households as it did in pagan ones. As seen earlier (p. 518) it was accepted as a fact of life by Jesus and Paul even though there were exhortations, derived equally from Stoic philosophy, of recognizing the shared humanity of slave and free, something that, it was argued, would eventually be recognized by God in the afterlife. Although bishops had the right to free slaves, there is no evidence that they did so in greater numbers than pagan magistrates. A number of canons laid down that a slave could not be ordained. When John Cassian

wrote his *Institutes*, a set of rules for monastic life, in the 420s, slavery was such a natural part of life to him that he tells his readers that a monk must think of himself as 'an estate-born slave' and submit to the demands of his abbot faster even than the slave of the harshest master.

Moreover the idea that slavery was a punishment for sin (see John 8: 34) persisted in the works of John Chrysostom and Augustine. The humility of the slave, ready to accept whatever fortune brought him, was often invoked as a mark of Christian piety. Doubtless there were many Christian households that saw it a moral duty to respect the welfare of their slaves but it was not until Gregory of Nyssa (died 395) that one finds the first Christian attack on the institution itself. (See now Kyle Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World, AD 275–425*, Cambridge, 2011, which stresses the continuation of slavery in both Christian and pagan society.)

The art of the period also shows the extent of shared territory. The basilica was one building adapted to Christian use; another was the circular mausoleum, traditionally used as the resting place of emperors. Constantine created one for himself in Constantinople while in Rome the mausoleums of his mother Helena and his daughter Constantina (Santa Costanza) survive. Much of the mosaic decoration of Santa Costanza (354) shows no Christian influence whatsoever. There are cupids, cherubs picking grapes, and vine leaves (although images of Christ giving the law to Peter, the so-called *traditio legis*, were added later). The first public Christian art (as distinct from that concealed in the catacombs) shows Christian themes mingled with pagan symbolism and motifs. In one sarcophagus of the mid-fourth century from Rome, the twins Castor and Pollux, traditionally seen in Roman mythology as guardians of the dead and symbols of immortality, are placed alongside reliefs of the feeding of the 5,000 and an incident in the life of St Peter. In the marriage casket from the Esquiline treasure (of c.380, now in the British Museum), a Christian inscription surrounds artwork that is still rooted in classical mythology with a nude Venus occupying a prominent position. Other sarcophagi show Christ receiving such traditional classical emblems as a laurel crown or depicted as a pagan god, Apollo, while images of the Virgin and Child appear to be derived from those of the Egyptian goddess Isis and her son Horus. Fifth-century mosaics in the villas of north Africa are unashamedly classical in their subject matter and even the mosaics uncovered in Justinian's palace in Constantinople are traditional, with no hint of Christianity.

In this sense Christianity was drawing on the cultural background it shared with paganism. It was a gradual process by which Christian art was to develop its own distinct systems of iconography and ritual. If, in Rome, one walks across from the bucolic mosaics of Santa Costanza to the neighbouring church of St Agnes, the magnificent early seventh-century mosaic of St Agnes shows the difference. In the evocative words of Peter Brown: 'St. Agnes hovers silently and alone, set against a bottomless sea of gold, above an apse made as exquisite and translucent as a honeycomb by marble columns.' Even if pagan themes were eventually eclipsed or subsumed, they survived much longer than traditional accounts have suggested largely because the mass of Christians now flocking into the church had no incentive to abandon them.

One could perhaps talk as easily of the pagan adoption of Christianity as of the Christian adoption of the pagan world. The traditional narrative of two cultures in conflict, with Christianity 'triumphing' over paganism, has long been superseded. (For the developments in art see Jas Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph: The Art of the Roman Empire, 100–450*, New York and Oxford, 1998.)

The Growth of Asceticism

There were however exceptions to this acquiescence of Christians in traditional values. While many Christians enjoyed being in and of the world, exercising their power as bishops or as advisers to the emperor, a minority saw the world as a haven of wickedness. This was perhaps reinforced by the new-found wealth of the church which appeared to many to be a betrayal of the teachings of its founders. Jerome's comments on Christ lying naked outside the doors of opulent churches has already been quoted. The endless bitter doctrinal disputes must have impelled many to escape the city and seek a life of independent meditation.

So there was withdrawal. The Egyptian Antony, so-called 'father of the monks', lived 70 of his purported 100 years in the desert, remote from any human contact. (A life of Antony, ascribed to Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, was the first in a long line of hagiographical accounts of holy men and women which provided exemplars for those who wished to renounce the world.) In Syria some holy men climbed pillars and lived on top of them for years with thousands of curious or devout visitors coming to stare. Not all could bear the lack of immediate human contact. In Egypt the withdrawal from the world took place in communities. Thousands of ordinary men, most of them villagers by birth, crowded into settlements where they lived according to a routine of prayer and manual labour. These were the first monasteries. The founding figure of monasticism is usually seen to be one Pachomius, an ex-army man, who stressed the separation of the monastery from the rest of the clergy and the importance of monks living as equals within their community. The most influential of the early monastic leaders of the east outside Egypt was Basil of Caesarea (333–79) (see above, p. 615). Basil believed that hospitality was an essential element of monastic life. Monastic communities should work and live in poverty passing on all surplus produce to the poor. Basil himself founded a whole complex of buildings outside Caesarea including a hospital and a leper colony.

However successful an individual might be in escaping from other human beings he or she still had a physical body to contend with. It was a problem well known to the Greek philosophers, who had long asserted that the desires of the flesh hampered them in their search for the spiritual world. So asceticism was not a Christian invention although Christians were more preoccupied with sexual desire than the Greek philosophers were. Peter Brown in his *Body and Society* traces this preoccupation back to Paul and it seems that celibacy was also practised by some Jewish communities such as that at Qumran. By the fourth century the preoccupation had become an obsession, part of the more widespread movement of renunciation of

physical pleasures followed by the first hermits and monks. The act of sex in itself was now viewed by many with intense distaste. Some extremists, such as the Egyptian Hierakas, even doubted that married couples who had enjoyed the sexual act would be admitted to heaven. The more conventional view adopted by the church was that sex between married couples was acceptable but only as a means of creating children (or, as Jerome put it, more humans who could consecrate themselves to virginity!). The fulfilment of sexual desire as an end in itself was morally wrong. (See David Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy and Heresy in Ancient Christianity*, Oxford, 2006, and Peter Brown, *The Body in Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, 2nd edition, New York, 2008.)

This left women in an ambiguous position. On the one hand they could be cast, in the tradition of Eve, as temptresses to be avoided. The works of the church fathers are filled with dire warnings of the perils offered by glimpses of female flesh. On the other, those who made a commitment to virginity could achieve a certain status denied to their more carnal sisters. Even Jerome, who was more troubled by sexuality than most, could accept the company of virgins who were prepared to devote themselves to pious study. A minority of women, usually from upper-class backgrounds, discarded their wealth and founded hospitals or monasteries. Melania the Younger is the best-known example. She and her husband surrendered vast estates and Melania later founded a religious community on the Mount of Olives.

The Christian Intellectuals: John Chrysostom, Jerome, and Augustine

The late fourth and early fifth centuries produced a number of profound thinkers who had been brought up in the traditional world of classical learning, converted to Christianity, and then deployed their penetrating intellects in the service of the church. The hero of many of these men was the apostle Paul who enjoyed an important revival in the late fourth century. In Constantine's day he had been honoured in Rome by no more than a shrine over the supposed place of his martyrdom. In the 380s this was transformed into a great basilica, San Paolo fuori le mure. Paul's attraction lay in his stress on authority at a time of apparent social and political breakdown and he was used as an intellectual battering ram against the pagan elites who remained strong in Rome until early in the fifth century. His distaste of sexuality also appealed to the more ascetic Christians. He was especially important for Augustine to the extent that the scholar Paula Fredriksen has claimed that 'much of western thought can be seen as one long response to Augustine's Paul'.

An equally fervent supporter of Paul was John Chrysostom, 'the golden-mouthed' (c.347–407). John was born into the Greek-speaking elite of Antioch in Syria. From an early age he was such a gifted speaker that it was assumed that he would become a lawyer or civil servant like his father. However, he was baptized when 21 and then took to a life of solitude in the caves around Antioch. He emerged, his health per-

manently damaged, with a loathing for finery and self-indulgence. Any hint of greed or arrogance aroused his anger and it was said that he would sternly fix his eye on the women in his congregation who appeared overdressed. His harshness was modified, however, by his concern for the poor of his congregations, many of whom welcomed his denunciations of the rich. His sermons were full of powerful imagery. 'Do you pay such honour to your excrements as to receive them in a silver chamber pot when another man made in the image of God is perishing of cold?' On Paul he told his congregations, 'If I am regarded as a learned man, it's not because I'm brainy. It's simply because I have such a love for Paul that I have never left off reading him. He has taught me all that I need to know. And I want you to listen to what he has to teach you. You don't need to do anything else [*sic*].'

Until he was 50 John served in Antioch, earning an empire-wide reputation as a preacher. However, Paul was not his only concern. It was during these years that he preached his eight sermons warning Christians against Judaism. The context appears to have been the continuing vigour of Judaism in Antioch and the readiness of Christians to attend synagogues. John's invective bordered on the deranged and his sermons, translated into Latin and transferred to the west, later fuelled anti-Jewish hysteria in medieval Europe.

In 398 John was forced by the imperial family to accept the bishopric of Constantinople. It was an unhappy move. He was never at ease in the shadow of an opulent court, offended many by his habit of eating alone, and aroused the anger of many clergy through prurient insinuations about their sex lives. A determined attempt to unseat him by Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria (who remained incensed by the elevation of Constantinople above his ancient see), proved successful when John forfeited any remaining support in the court by what appeared to be attacks on the worldliness of the empress Eudoxia. Only the poor remained loyal but their rioting in his favour was never likely to secure his survival. Finally he was exiled to a remote village on the coast of the Black Sea where he died in 407. (See J. N. D. Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom*, Ithaca, NY, 1998.)

John Chrysostom moved in a Christian world that was gradually being divided into Greek-speaking east and Latin-speaking west. Symbolically, an important moment came in the 380s when bishop Damasus of Rome ordered the use of Latin rather than Greek for the liturgy in the western empire on the grounds that Greek was no longer understood. As Greek became less widely spoken in the west, many of the works of the eastern church fathers now never reached Rome. A letter to an eastern contact survives from Augustine, whose Greek was limited, pleading for more translations.

This linguistic isolation was reinforced by the distance of Rome from the Greek-speaking Christian communities and the decline of the city as an administrative centre of the empire. The bishops of Rome were outraged when the Council of 381 affirmed that 'the bishop of Constantinople has the privileges of honour after the bishop of Rome because it is the new Rome'. Things were not helped by the administrative division between the eastern and western empires that became permanent in 395. Even if neither side was as yet prepared to recognize the fact, two distinct

churches (later, of course, but not officially until 1054, the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches) were in the process of emerging.

One of the last of the major Christian thinkers to be at home in both east and west was Jerome. Jerome had been born in the Balkans about 347 of Christian parents but by the age of 12 he was studying philosophy and rhetoric in Rome. He developed a profound love of classical authors and one of the most shattering events of his life was a dream in which God accused him of preferring Cicero to the Bible, for which failing he was flogged. He resolved never to read a pagan author again (though his letters remain full of classical allusions).

Jerome's life was restless and tormented. He travelled incessantly and underwent periods of severe asceticism. In the words of Peter Brown, 'the human body remained for Jerome a darkened forest, filled with the roaring of wild beasts, that could be controlled only by rigid codes of diet and by the strict avoidance of occasions for sexual attraction'. His letters to adversaries are deeply vindictive. At the same time, however, he studied assiduously and mastered both Greek and Hebrew in addition to his native Latin. It was this breadth of knowledge that recommended him to bishop Damasus of Rome, who employed him first as his secretary (382–4) and then as the translator of the Greek and Hebrew texts of the Old and New Testaments into Latin.

A unified and authoritative translation had long been needed. There were all too many Latin translations of varying quality circulating in the western empire. Jerome faced formidable problems in achieving his task. In Rome his censorious personality and suspicion over a new translation made him so unpopular that after the death of Damasus he was forced to leave the city. The last thirty-four years of his life were spent in Bethlehem in a monastery and it was here that his translation was finally brought to a conclusion. At first it received little recognition but by the eighth century it was accepted by the church as the authoritative Latin version of the original texts. As the Vulgate (the 'common version') it lasted unchallenged in the Catholic church for centuries and remains one of the great achievements of early Christian scholarship. (The life and works are well covered in J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings and Controversies*, London and New York, 1975.)

It was to Jerome that Augustine sent his letter asking for more translations of the Greek Christian texts. Augustine had been born in Thagaste (modern Algeria) in 354, had studied rhetoric at Carthage thanks to the patronage of a family friend, and eventually been recommended to the post of the city orator in Milan. His mother was a Christian but Augustine had been drawn to Manichaeism, an austere sect based on the teachings of the Persian sage Mani that was sweeping the empire. In Milan, however, he moved in new directions after he had encountered Ambrose. Up to now he had found the scriptures shallow but Ambrose, himself a convert, of course, convinced him otherwise. Augustine's studies of Plotinus (see above, p. 598) also helped consolidate his theological thinking. The moment of his conversion came after many doubts when he heard the voice of a child asking him to take up the New Testament. He opened it at the words of Paul, 'Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires.' Suddenly he had

found his true haven, in the church. Once he had renounced the satisfaction of his sexual desires for ever, he was able to be baptized. (His partner of many years, with whom he had had a son, was discarded.)

(For Augustine, there are excellent biographies by Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, updated edition, Berkeley and London, 2000, and Serge Lancel, *St. Augustine*, trans. Antonia Nevill, London, 2002. Studies in Augustine's theology include Carol Harrison, *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity*, Oxford and New York, 2000, and John Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptised*, Cambridge and New York, 1994.)

After his conversion and baptism, Augustine returned to his native Africa and was pressurized into becoming bishop of Hippo, where he remained until his death in 430. Hippo was a provincial town, if a prosperous one, and there were 700 other similar bishoprics in the provinces of Africa, so this was hardly a prestigious office. Soon Augustine took to writing. He detailed the experiences leading to his conversion in the *Confessions*, a brilliant account of a tortured mind searching for absolute peace and perhaps the first great autobiography in western literature. In the tradition of Paul, who had also been preoccupied by his sinfulness, Augustine presents himself as a deeply unworthy man, tormented by his sexuality and harried, although he took some time to recognize the fact, by the looming power of God.

I broke your lawful bounds and did not escape your lash. For what man can escape it? You were always present, angry and merciful at once, strewing the pangs of bitterness over all my lawless pleasures to lead me on to look for others unallied with pain. You meant me to find them nowhere but in yourself, O Lord, for you teach us by inflicting pain, you smite so you may heal and you kill us so that we may not die away from you. (Translation: R. Pine-Coffin)

Augustine came to accept that God's love becomes available to sinners only when they make complete submission to him.

While he preferred the life of the monk, Augustine cared deeply about the needs of the ordinary Christians who thronged his churches and was more sensitive than most church leaders to their earthly desires. (He was prepared, for instance, to accept sexuality as an intrinsic part of marriage.) It was his determination to be heard (several hundred of his sermons survive) that gave him his prestige. In the remaining years of his life, he applied the brilliance and clarity of his mind to some of the major theological issues of the day. Perhaps the most famous was the dispute with Pelagius, an ascetic who may have been of British birth, over the nature of free will. (The Pelagian controversy is explored at length in Brown, *Through the Eye of the Needle*, chapters 19–22.)

Pelagius argued that each individual had the freedom to follow God's will or not. The hope, of course, was that he or she would choose to aim for a life of perfection, with Christ as the model. Pelagius insisted that such perfection was possible through the exercise of free and unhampered will and he expected that the committed Christian would adopt an ascetic life. If so he could achieve salvation for himself. Augustine, on the other hand, developed a different approach, one that had only been dimly formulated before his time. This was the view that, as a result of Adam

and Eve's transgressions in the Garden of Eden, God had burdened all human beings with an 'original sin' which was passed on from generation to generation. The concept of original sin had never been mentioned by Jesus and Augustine relied on one verse from St Paul (Romans 5: 12) for support. The consequences of the sin were, however, profound. Even the power of human reason, suggested Augustine, had been reduced to a spark and as a result (as Plato would have agreed) human beings were drawn to the earthly pleasures of the world. Only the grace of God could liberate them from the degradation of these pleasures. This grace could be passed on through the sacraments, especially those of baptism and the Eucharist, but it was always a gift from God, not the right of any individual, however good his or her life. This was a direct challenge to Pelagius' optimism that all could be saved if they themselves wished it.

Augustine's God was, therefore, selective. Only a few would be saved. While the first Christians had been convinced of their salvation in heaven, now none of them could be sure of it. This left uncomfortable questions to be resolved. Was it possible to live a good life and still be deprived of the grace of God? What would happen to those who did not receive this grace or who were never baptized? When challenged by his opponents over what would happen to the souls of babies who had died before they were baptized Augustine was forced to accept that their original sin left them unprotected and they could never be admitted to heaven. Independently Augustine also came to reject Origen's view that the concept of eternal punishment was incompatible with the goodness of God and became one of the foremost defenders of a hell where punishment would be harsh and eternal. There would be no mercy for those to whom the grace of God was not extended. (Augustine's thoughts on these issues were spelled out relentlessly in the closing chapters of his *The City of God*.)

Augustine's concept of original sin was, in the early fifth century, a minority view held only by some of his fellow bishops in north Africa. As another opponent, Julian of Eclanum (a town near Benevento, Italy), commented, the whole idea was improbable, making it seem as if the devil, not a loving God, had created man. What was remarkable, however, was that through sheer persistence and intellectual energy (and, his opponents suggested, some cleverly targeted bribery) Augustine managed to get his view accepted as the official doctrine of the western church after the emperor Honorius insisted the Italian bishops adopt it. Pelagius was condemned and Julian, one of the most attractive and intellectually sophisticated bishops of his day, was hounded out of his bishopric and forced to move to the east. The concept of original sin received no support elsewhere. It never travelled to the east (Augustine wrote only in Latin), nor was it adopted by any other monotheistic religion.

The Pelagian debate was an unhappy one in the history of the church. It was true that the life of perfection that Pelagius insisted on would have been beyond most believers but the theological arguments over the place of free will in human behaviour were immensely important ones and deserved to be debated openly. Augustine's approach, that the freedom of will that had existed, for a brief moment, in Adam had been largely extinguished by his sin, was highly speculative. Some kind of balanced solution between the two extremes might have been found, but the

high-handed behaviour of Augustine and his demonization of his opponents made this impossible. Already much of the vitality of theological debate had been sapped by the edicts of Theodosius, but now the Pelagian dispute made nonsense of the idea of theology making progress through reasoned discourse.

Augustine also made an important contribution to the definition of 'the Church'. (The capital 'C' is used to note Augustine's belief that there was one single institution that truly represented the Christian community, a view adopted, of course, by the medieval Catholic Church.) Joining the Church and receiving its sacraments presumably increased the chance of receiving the gift of God's grace but the logic of Augustine's views suggested that membership of the Church did not guarantee salvation and that those who did not join the Church were not necessarily deprived of it. The Church, however, had a duty to ensure that all who wished to join and receive the benefits of its sacraments could do so. Augustine's main opponents here were the Donatists (still a majority of the Christians in Hippo and north Africa as a whole), who continued to insist that the state church had been fatally contaminated by accepting back those members who had lapsed during the persecutions and that they were right to keep their own Christians from joining it.

To counter this attack Augustine argued that the validity of his Church did not depend on the worthiness of its members. The sacrament of baptism given by an unworthy priest was still valid in the eyes of God. It followed that the Donatists, through their intransigence, were depriving those who might be eligible for God's grace from receiving it through the sacraments. Therefore it was legitimate to destroy the sect and release its followers to their proper home in the Church. This approach reinforced the view taken by Theodosius and Ambrose, that the orthodox Christianity, backed by the state, had the right to deal with heresy. Although Augustine cautioned restraint in the methods employed against heretics, his words were used in later centuries to justify the persecutions of medieval and Reformation Europe. (Again, see Brent Shaw, *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine*, Cambridge, 2011.)

Augustine's last major work, *The City of God*, was prompted by the sack of Rome by the Visigoths in 410 (see Chapter 34). Although the physical damage was not immense (and the Christian Visigoths left the city's churches untouched), the psychological shock certainly was. It seemed as if the world as all had known it was at an end. Much of the work is concerned with pointing out the failure of traditional Roman religion to save the city or to provide anything more than a self-glorification of the state. Augustine argued that the true 'city' was, instead, that inhabited by the believers loved by God, a community that extended from earth into heaven. An earthly city, even one so great as Rome, was only a pale reflection of the heavenly one and it was to the heavenly city that the aspirations of men and women must be directed. The fall of Rome was thus of little significance in the eyes of God. In *The City of God*, Augustine makes a dramatic break with the Graeco-Roman conception of the city as the context in which human beings achieve their highest state of being. Now the city is no more than a backdrop to their lives although the Church can hope that it will be given tolerance. In his description of society Augustine comes

across as a social conservative, supporting traditional hierarchies and slavery and cynical about the possibilities of social progress. Perhaps more than any other Christian thinker, Augustine is responsible for the alliance of the churches with the authority figures of the day that has risked eclipsing the more radical message of the Gospels.

Augustine's influence on Christian theology was profound. His writing and sermons had a clarity and majesty that was unrivalled. His mind penetrated every nook and cranny of Christian thought. Much of his writing, in Book IX of *The Confessions*, for instance, where his last conversations with his mother are recorded, is deeply moving. He was not a cold intellectual but a human being acutely aware of the power of his emotional feelings. It is hard not to feel some sympathy for him in his agonizing searches for his God. Ultimately, however, his message was a chilling one. There was no salvation without divine grace and this could not necessarily be gained through living a 'good' life. His conflict with Pelagius over free will was resolved in his favour but only after an aggressive campaign, as much political as theological, had silenced his opponents. He justified the right of his Church to prosecute heretics and to call on the state to support it. Only those who are convinced that divine grace is theirs and who through it have liberated themselves from their body's desires can read his works with total ease. The legacy of Augustine remains controversial not least because he was given a status by the medieval church that threatened the priority of the Gospels as a source of faith and theology.

Conclusion: A Transformed Society?

In 394 the emperor Theodosius had been challenged by Eugenius, a usurper from Gaul. Eugenius was a pagan and attracted the support of many leading Roman senators. Theodosius met their forces at the river Frigidus in the Alps and crushed them. The battle was seen by contemporary Christians as the confirmation of the triumph of their faith. The arrival of the *bora*, a cutting wind from the Alps, which scattered Eugenius' forces, was interpreted as a miraculous intervention.

Despite the dramatic presentation of the battle between two opposing forces, the church, in fact, was by now largely integrated into Roman society. Christianity had been associated by Constantine and his successors with success in war. Its Nicene bishops were powerful figures and expected to uphold the authority of the state. A vast building programme of churches contrasted with the decay of other public buildings.

Yet this was a changed world. The pleas that the pagan senator Symmachus made to Gratian over the statue of Victory in the senate house survive: 'What does it matter what practical system we adopt in our search for truth? Not by one avenue only can we arrive at so tremendous a secret,' he protested. Now it did matter. For the first time, in Theodosius' edict of 380, the state had taken responsibility for defining what 'truth', in the sense of correct belief, consisted of. This marks a turning point in the history of western thought. While Greeks and Romans had punished blas-

phemy and wild expressions of religious ecstasy, this had been done on an ad hoc basis. It was never believed that there was a deliberate campaign to undermine the traditional gods—there were simply specific disruptions or blasphemous individuals who needed to be dealt with as need arose. Although this is not often appreciated, from now on theological orthodoxy had become part of the wider history of western thought.

In this new world, heretics were considered to be an army of enemies of God, always in battle formation and ready to seek out the weaknesses of the orthodox (who in Augustine's formulation were orientated towards wickedness in any case). A common symbol for heresy was the many-headed Hydra, the mythical creature who grew two new heads for every one that was cut off. So the fight against heresy was perceived as never-ending. Those who succumbed to the blandishments of the heretics would be condemned to everlasting hellfire, a tortuous fate unknown in the pagan world. (See John Casey's excellent *After Lives: A Guide to Heaven, Hell and Purgatory*, Oxford and New York, 2009, whose opening chapters range across the pagan and Christian world of antiquity.)

A growing preoccupation with the elimination of paganism and heresy meant, inevitably, that the rich diversity of Graeco-Roman spiritual experience was stifled, with the result that, eventually, spiritual aspirations could no longer be expressed outside a Christian context. Christianity had become as much an expression of an ideology as of practice. Jews were increasingly isolated, and the fourth century marks for them, in the words of Nicholas de Lange, 'the beginning of a long period of desolation.'

In his *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* Edward Gibbon blamed this narrowing of perspective on Christianity but, however seductive the power of his prose, this is too simplistic. The Christianity of the fourth century may have been far removed from the Christianity of the Gospels and have been transformed into something that could never have been imagined from their teachings, an authoritarian institution with a rigid interpretation of 'truth' that now collaborated closely with the imperial government. However, without such a structure, the church could never have provided the cohesion and order the communities of the west needed as the Roman empire collapsed around them. The tensions resulting from the conflict between these different forms of authority have shaped the later history of Christianity.

On the death of Theodosius in 395 his two sons were declared joint emperors and the empire was split into two administrative areas with one son nominally responsible for each. Both were still young: Arcadius, emperor in the east, was only 18, Honorius even younger. In the north the division was made along the boundary of Illyricum, roughly where Greek replaced Latin as the predominant administrative language, a reminder that despite centuries of apparent unity the empire was still made up of two distinct linguistic cultures (as well as, of course, of a mass of minor ones). Illyricum was allocated to the east, an important advantage for Constantinople as it was a rich recruiting ground for troops.

The split became consolidated by other forces: a more buoyant economy in the east, based on peasant production rather than large estates, more defensible frontiers and less intractable enemies, perhaps the preservation of civilian rather than military rule for everyday administration, even an element of luck in that the emperors in the east lived longer and were more resolute characters than those in the west. The two halves of the empire were never to be reunited. (For good introductory surveys of this period see Chris Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome: A History of Europe from 400 to 1000*, London and New York, 2009; Peter Sarris, *Empires of Faith: The Fall of Rome to the Rise of Islam, 500–700*, Oxford and New York, 2011; and Julia Smith, *Europe After Rome: A New Cultural History, 500–1000*, Oxford and New York, 2005.)

The 'Fall' of the Western Empire

The western empire was to 'fall' eighty years later in 476. The 'fall' when it came was hardly a major or unexpected event in itself. By the 470s the western emperors had lost control of virtually all their territories outside Italy and relied on German soldiers to lead their own depleted troops. A boy emperor, Romulus 'Augustulus', 'the little Augustus', was deposed by a Germanic soldier, Odoacer, who then got in touch with the emperor in the east, Zeno, asking for a position as *patricius*, in effect a high-ranking subordinate with the status of consul. Zeno had hopes that his own nominee for western emperor, one Julius Nepos, who had been expelled from Italy shortly before, might yet be restored so he hesitated. By the time Julius died, unrestored, in 480, Odoacer was firmly in place as ruler of Italy and effective control

over the last remnants of the western empire had been lost. (It is good to report that Romulus' life was spared and there is some evidence that he was still living on a private estate in Italy thirty-five years after his deposition.)

The fall of the western part of the empire has gripped the imagination of later generations. Edward Gibbon's magnificent *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* must bear some of the responsibility, within the English-speaking world at least, for creating an image of a cataclysmic event in human history that requires some kind of special explanation (although Gibbon was not only concerned with the west and continued the story up to the fall of Constantinople in 1453). Gibbon himself laid the blame on Christianity, which he claimed had undermined the ancient warrior traditions of the Romans and, through the influence of monasticism and asceticism, turned them away from earthly things. He echoed the pagan historian Zosimus, writing in Constantinople about 500, who blamed the fall on the abandonment of sacrifices at the temple of Jupiter in Rome. These speculations do not explain why the east, more fully Christianized than the west, survived.

There have been innumerable other theories—one book lists 500 of them—but behind many of them lurks the assumption that the Roman empire had some magic element, a moral superiority, for instance, which should have protected it for ever against the processes of historical change. The idea is not new. Theodosius I was once told by one local Gallic magnate, 'We know that no revolution will ever overthrow the state because the Roman empire is fore-ordained to remain with you and your descendants.' Arguably it was the misplaced confidence in the survival of the empire that left its aristocratic and military leaders unable to conceive the radical alternative strategies needed to save it.

Every explanation, however, must include the fact that the empire in the west faced constant pressures along its extended borders on the Rhine and Danube. By 395 these pressures had lasted over 200 years, ever since the first wars against the Marcomanni in the 160s. What was remarkable was that the Roman armies had managed to hold the borders intact (with the surrender only of Dacia in the third century). The empire had continually found the resources to build forts and raise new armies while in the late third and early fourth century it had undergone a major restructuring under Diocletian and Constantine. Modern scholars have now re-established this period of 'late antiquity' as one of vitality and achievement. The old convention by which histories of the Roman empire were allowed to peter out after Diocletian can no longer be sustained.

So what changed in the late fourth century?

The 'Goths' in the Western Empire

It was the appearance of the Huns in the 370s that placed new and overwhelming pressures on the empire as peoples referred to in Roman sources as Goths were forced across its borders. By 382 some groups had been given some degree of independent status (see p. 611 above). As suggested earlier (p. 554) there is increasing

reluctance among scholars to see the Goths as in any way a people defined by ethnicity. The term is perhaps most accurately used of those peoples who were bound into allegiance to a particular 'Gothic' leader.

In the 380s one of these leaders, Alaric, emerged as a highly effective commander who secured widespread support among the peoples who had migrated south of the Danube. His Goths are conventionally termed the Visigoths (in contrast to the Ostrogoths, those Goths who remained north of the Danube and outside the empire) but if they were to survive as a distinct group it was essential that they forged their own identity. After the declaration of Nicene orthodoxy by Theodosius in 381, this was partly through their dogged adherence to Arianism, but they also had their own language (and a Gothic script developed by the Christian missionary Ulfilas for the translated scriptures). To further preserve their identity they were forbidden to intermarry with Romans.

Alaric's aim was to achieve, through diplomacy or force, a permanent settlement for his followers within the empire. When diplomacy failed he used the only weapon he had, the plundering of neighbouring land. By 395 he was moving his men into the Balkans through Thrace and Greece, using them as pressure points on the east. In 397 he seems to have been recognized by the eastern empire as a military commander in Illyricum but this recognition was not sustained and by 402 he was on the move again. This time he went west towards Italy.

Here his adversary was Stilicho, Theodosius' former *magister militum*, 'Master of Soldiers'. Stilicho was half German but had himself married Theodosius' niece and later married his daughter to the young emperor Honorius, an indication of how complex the relationship between Roman and German had now become. Stilicho claimed that, on his deathbed, Theodosius had asked him to act as guardian of both his sons, in other words become the regent of the empire. His attempts to intrigue to this end in the east and, in particular, to transfer Illyricum, a plentiful source of recruits, to his half of the empire, were unsuccessful. His plotting increased resentment against him in Constantinople and led to increasing division between east and west.

The extent of Stilicho's power in the west was shown in 402 when Honorius moved his court from Milan to Ravenna, a city surrounded by marshes and so almost impregnable. Honorius was in effect abdicating the traditional role of emperor as commander of his troops and from now on the western empire was normally fronted by a strong military figure, often German in origin, while the emperors lived in pampered seclusion. No wonder soldiers were said to yearn for the days of Valentinian when the emperor fought alongside his own men and shared their discomforts.

When confronted by Alaric Stilicho repulsed him but the Visigoth forces remained intact and probably settled back in Illyricum. By 405, however, Stilicho appears to have realized that the Visigoths could be sensibly used as soldiers within his own armies, possibly even as a means of entering the east. Before an agreement could be made, Alaric was threatening Italy once more, and in 407 Stilicho persuaded the senate to pay him over 4,000 pounds of gold and recognize him as an

allied force. This agreement infuriated the east, who recognized the threat Stilicho's ambitions now posed, especially after the eastern throne became vacant on the death of Arcadius in 408. Honorius himself had no wish to compromise with the 'barbarian' Goths and in 408 Stilicho's enemies persuaded the emperor to assassinate him. The agreement with Alaric was disowned. A wave of anti-barbarian hysteria led to a massacre of many of the Germans who now made up a large part of the Roman armies.

With his link to Stilicho gone, Alaric's bluff had now been called. He desperately needed a settlement if he was to retain credibility with his followers. While Honorius refused to bargain, Alaric was forced to negotiate with the senate in Rome in the hope that the senators would put pressure on Honorius. It was when the negotiations proved fruitless that, in 410, Alaric led his men into Rome and carried out the sack of the city, the first for 800 years. It was a move that had a devastating effect on the Roman world, far beyond its importance as an act of destruction, which was comparatively limited. Rome no longer enjoyed the aura of an eternal and inviolable city. Yet the sack achieved nothing for Alaric and he now appears to have considered moving his men to Africa. On the way south he died and his brother-in-law Athaulf, who succeeded him, decided to move the Visigoths northwards to Gaul.

A Disintegrating Empire

The preoccupation with Alaric's Goths had left the western government paralysed while far more serious incursions were taking place to the north. At the end of 406 there had been a major invasion of northern Gaul, over the frozen Rhine, by Vandals, Sueves, and Alamanni. This time they were largely unopposed (although the Franks, now settled along the border, did honour early promises and offer some resistance) and spread quickly southwards. The Romans were forced to replace their command centre at Trier with Arles in the far south of Gaul. The collapse of the Roman defences was viewed with dismay in Britain, which was itself suffering raids from Saxons and others. The British legions took matters into their own hands. An abandoned Gaul meant an isolated and indefensible Britain. The legions elevated one of their number, Constantine, as emperor and it was Constantine who crossed into Gaul to lead a counter-attack. In the short term he was astonishingly successful. He gained some kind of control over both Gaul and Spain and in 409 Honorius was temporarily forced to accept him as a fellow Augustus.

However, Constantine's 'empire', which he ruled from Arles, was short-lived. His Spanish commanders proclaimed their own emperor and Britain proved too distant from Arles to be controlled. The Roman administration there seems simply to have fallen apart and was never revived. By 430 coinage had ceased and urban life was already in decay. Rival invaders, Scots, Saxons, Angles, and Jutes, took over the country and no central rule was to be reimposed for centuries. In Gaul itself another German people, the Burgundians, appear now to have crossed into the empire and established themselves south of Trier. Constantine was reduced to holding out

in Arles, where he was eventually captured by Honorius' new *magister militum*, Constantius, in 411 and put to death.

It appears that from now on the western empire was unable to launch any major military initiatives with its own troops. Quite what had happened to the Roman armies is difficult to discover. The *Notitia Dignitatum*, the 'Register of Civil and Military Dignitaries', compiled some time after 395 and surviving in a western copy, lists military units with a nominal total of 250,000 men in the west but in reality there seem to have been only about 65,000 troops, perhaps 30,000 each in Gaul and Italy. Most of these were probably Germans. Germans had served as mercenaries for centuries, making their fortunes in Roman service and then returning to their homes. More recently prisoners of war, Sueves, Sarmatians, and Burgundians among them, had been settled and bound to military service but now there were also whole contingents of Franks and Goths serving under their own officers. (The cemeteries of Roman forts of the late fourth and early fifth centuries in Belgium show a proportion of German troops ranging from 20 to 70 per cent.) The Germans had usually proved to be loyal and hardy fighters but by the early fifth century the armies do not seem to have operated as effective and controlled units. Increasingly the administration had to rely on the unsatisfactory alternative of using one tribe directly against another. The Visigoths, for instance, were used against the Burgundians in the north and then sent into Spain against the Vandals. They were then settled in 418 in Aquitaine between Toulouse and the Atlantic as a 'federate' kingdom.

The details of this new arrangement, in effect the recognition of a German kingdom within the empire, remain obscure. One view put forward by Walter Goffart in his *Barbarians and Romans* (Princeton, 1987) is that a proportion of the tax revenue from the area they settled in was diverted directly to Germans, in effect depriving the Roman state of it. If this is true the Visigoths had secured some independence while further diminishing the resources of the imperial government. The trouble was that the Visigoths had no incentive to remain within the boundaries allocated them and they were soon set on further expansion. The same was true of the Sueves who had settled in Galicia (north-western Spain). They too were given federate status but by the 430s were migrating further into Spain.

Meanwhile, the Vandals, who had crossed into Spain with the Sueves in 409, had come to rest in the south of the country. In 429 they moved on. Their leader Gaiseric, perhaps the most successful of all the Germanic leaders, led them across the straits into Africa. Twenty thousand men and their families, 80,000 in all, made the crossing. It was a shrewd move. Not only was the land fertile but Italy still drew on its surplus of corn. Gaiseric knew that by holding Africa he could put direct pressure on the centre of the empire. Once ashore the Vandals moved quickly along the coast taking the main ports. (The elderly Augustine died in Hippo in 430 while the city was under siege.) In 435 the Romans were forced to give the Vandal kingdom federate status but this did not stop further expansion. Carthage was sacked in 439 and Gaiseric then seized the islands of the western Mediterranean. These were the greatest defeats the empire had yet suffered, not least in the loss of yet more desperately needed resources.

Aetius, ‘The Last of the Romans’

Honorius had died in 423. The western army elevated one John to succeed him but the eastern emperor, Theodosius II, disapproved and installed a 6-year-old, Valentinian III, as his choice. In effect power was in the hands of Valentinian’s mother, Galla Placidia, the granddaughter of Valentinian I. Galla Placidia had had a most unsettled life. Taken off by the Visigoths as a hostage after the sack of Rome, she had married the Visigothic leader, Athaulf. Returned to the Romans after his death, she then married Constantius, Honorius’ new strong man. The young Valentinian was the result. His father had died in 421 and Galla Placidia had taken refuge in Constantinople. It was from there that she was restored to Italy. She was a strong woman and for ten years she held her own against her army officers. In 433, however, she was outmanoeuvred by her *magister militum*, Aetius, who now became the dominant figure in the western empire and remained so for the next twenty years.

Aetius had spent some years of his youth as a hostage with the Huns but he had managed to build such good relationships with his captors that he was able to raise his own armies from them. It was these forces he used in his attempts to defend the empire. Aetius’ focus remained a narrow one. He made no attempt to defend or regain Africa, Spain, or Britain and in 442 he acquiesced in a treaty between the emperor and Gaiseric in which Valentinian’s daughter Eudocia was to marry Gaiseric’s son Huneric. His immediate concern was to sustain the imperial presence in Gaul. By this time both the Visigoths and the Burgundians were well established there and Aetius felt it crucial to exercise more effective control over them. He had some success in containing the Visigoths and one of the finds in the Roman Forum has been the pedestal of a statue dedicated to him by a grateful senate in 439 that praises him for ‘having returned Gaul to the Roman empire’. In 443 he also crushed the Burgundians and set them up as a third federate kingdom around Lake Geneva (doubtless hoping that they would be more controllable there than in the north).

Aetius’ success depended on a constant supply of Hunnic mercenaries drawn from a society that had remained small scale and decentralized. However, in the 430s the Huns seem to have undergone the same sort of transformation as the Goths had in the 380s with consolidation under a central leader. By 445 this was one Attila. Under Attila’s leadership the Huns took a more aggressive attitude towards the empire. They now started raiding the Balkans and the eastern emperor Theodosius had to pay them subsidies to desist. When Theodosius died in 450, however, the new emperor in the east, Marcian, refused to continue the subsidies and the Huns turned their attentions to Gaul.

The attacks meant the total collapse of Aetius’ strategy. The main source of his troops was being turned against him and concentrated on the area he was most determined to preserve within the empire. He had no option but to call on his former enemies, the Visigoths and Burgundians, to join with other German tribes in repulsing the Huns. This they did successfully at the Battle of Catalaunian Plains (west of Troyes in Champagne) in 451 after which Attila retreated. In the following year,

however, he was back raiding Italy. Significantly there was little resistance. Aquileia was one of the provincial capitals sacked, but a failure of supplies appears to have dissuaded Attila from attacking Rome. (An alternative version has the pope Leo I, aided by the miraculous presence of St Peter, turning Attila back from the city.) The empire seemed at his mercy when, fortuitously, he died in 453 and his forces disintegrated.

The strategy of Aetius was now thoroughly discredited. He had not even been able to defend Italy. His enemies now saw their opportunity. Aetius was summoned to the emperor's presence in Ravenna and executed, possibly by Valentinian himself. Six months later some officers loyal to Aetius had their revenge and struck down Valentinian. His death brought to an end the dynasty founded by Valentinian I ninety years before.

The Final Years of the Western Empire, AD 455–476

Aetius' designation as 'the last of the Romans' is perhaps an appropriate description as, during the twenty years of his dominance, the empire had disintegrated still further. Its survival was now dependent on a variety of volatile peoples none of whom had any interest in remaining a loyal ally, especially when their leaders had the chance to extend their own territories. The Roman administration was kept afloat by hurried and usually ineffective diplomatic deals. Italy had become especially vulnerable to attack from the sea. The new emperor, Petronius Maximus, tried to consolidate his position by marrying his son to Valentinian's daughter Eudocia. Gaiseric had been promised Eudocia for his own son back in 442 and so now had a fine excuse to send a fleet to Rome in 455 and sack it once again. In 458 he took Sicily, held as a Roman province for nearly 700 years.

The effectiveness of their navy had established the Vandals as the main threat to the empire. The new *magister militum*, Avitus, a Gallic aristocrat, determined to use the Visigoths to invade Africa. In the event the Visigoths exploited their indispensability to move into Spain, where the structure of Roman administration had by now collapsed. Britain, Spain, Africa, and much of Gaul had now fallen out of Roman control.

After the death of Petronius Maximus in 455 Avitus declared himself emperor but his continuing failure to tackle the Vandals and his Gallic origin meant he had little support among the senators of Rome, to whom the Vandal threat was the main concern. When a German commander of half Visigothic and half Suevic origin, one Ricimer, defeated the Vandals in a sea battle, the senators were impressed enough to choose him as the empire's new strong man. An emperor, Marjorian, a former army officer, was also provided and the two combined to depose Avitus.

Between 456 and 472 it was Ricimer who managed what remained of the western empire. Emperors survived only with his support and were deposed or murdered when they lost it. Marjorian was executed in 461, probably as a result of attempts to make peace with the Vandals. His replacement, Severus, died, possibly poisoned by Ricimer, in 465. In 467 Ricimer saw the advantage of making an alliance with the

east, accepting an eastern nominee, Anthemius, as emperor in the west in return for effective help against the Vandals. However, an expedition launched by the east against the Vandals in 468 proved a disastrous failure and relationships between Ricimer and Anthemius broke down so completely that Anthemius ended up as another of Ricimer's victims, dragged from a church in Rome where he had sought sanctuary, and executed. When Ricimer himself died in 472 the empire outside Italy was effectively lost for good.

The eastern emperor, Zeno, now tried to impose his own nominee as emperor, one Julius Nepos, but he was expelled to Dalmatia where he had been previously the *magister militum*. His successor, his own *magister militum*, Orestes, appointed his son, Romulus 'Augustulus', as emperor and it was he who was deposed by Odoacer in 476.

The story of the last years of the empire of the west is one in which Roman administration gradually disintegrated. In many areas, as has been seen, the administration was simply delegated to German tribes, in others it atrophied. In the life of Severinus by Eugippius there is an atmospheric account of the last days of imperial rule in the province of Noricum. As late as the 470s there were still army units stationed in the main cities of the province. At one point their pay failed to arrive. One unit sent off a delegation to Italy to collect the money but no more was heard of it and the unit disbanded itself. Others followed and the defence of the frontier was, in effect, abandoned. Germans soon moved over the frontier to take control.

Coming to Terms with a New World: The Survival of Roman Culture in the Late Fifth Century

With the collapse of the old administration local populations were now coming to terms with their new Germanic rulers. Walter Goffart (see above) had argued that this was a relatively peaceful process. However, more recent surveys have been less supportive of Goffart and his followers. While in many areas accommodation had been taking place over decades and without major upheaval, the disintegration of the old trading networks and the disruptions of ravaging armies led to a major economic breakdown. There are reports of armed peasants, the *baucadae*, looting the countryside. As Bryan Ward-Perkins has shown in his *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (Oxford, 2005), the results were often cataclysmic, not least in the loss of skills. Britain was especially badly affected; here living standards fell back to what they had been before the Roman conquest. A telling shift, seen in northern Gaul as well as in Britain, is from arable farming that depends on stability and security, to pastoral farming with sheep and cattle that can be moved away during times of disorder.

The picture in Italy is also of serious economic decline. The port of Ostia was already in decay as early as 350—when cracks appeared in the walls of the theatre they were patched up by using the inscribed plinths of statues of former notables, an ominous sign of a city which had lost its pride. The villa economy around Monte

Cassino in Italy seems to have collapsed as early as AD 400. By the sixth century there was no longer any navigation up the Tiber, and the Via Ostiense, the main road into Rome from Ostia, was described as totally overgrown. Rome's population shrank dramatically in the sixth century, from perhaps 100,000 at the beginning of the century to 30,000–40,000 by the end. The only areas where a functioning economy, including a range of coinage, survived were those coastal areas, southern Spain, southern Gaul, Italy, and the African coasts, where trade continued with Constantinople. The breakdown of trade meant not only the loss of consumer goods but the disruption of cultural connections. The isolation that followed as the empire fragmented was beyond anyone's previous experience. (Part I of Michael McCormick's *Origins of the European Economy*, Cambridge, 2002, discusses the archaeological evidence for the changing patterns in trade.)

The letters of the Gallic aristocrat Sidonius Apollinaris provide a fine picture of how a sophisticated man, schooled in classical traditions, could survive. Sidonius, the son-in-law of Avitus, had inherited a beautiful if remote estate in the Auvergne. Here he cultivated the life of a landowner and, like many of his class, became a bishop, of Clermont in 470. The church now provided the only avenue through which a Roman aristocrat could maintain status. When his city was besieged by Visigoths in 475 Sidonius directed its defence, but after its surrender he worked hard to cultivate relationships with his new overlords. He was shrewd enough to recognize that the Visigoths offered the best hope of defence against other attacks, and to sustain the relationship he was even prepared to visit the Visigothic king, Theodoric, to play backgammon with him. The appearance and manners of those Germans billeted on his estate he found less palatable.

The fragmentary evidence, especially from Germanic law codes (themselves modelled on Roman ones, see below), suggests a variety of arrangements: the direct seizure of land by the migrants, an imposed division of estates between owners and their newcomers, with two-thirds of an estate allocated to the 'barbarians', or simply an acquiescence in the occupation of land with the original Roman owner being eased out over time. The vast imperial estates of Gaul appeared to have been appropriated intact by the Merovingian kings (see below p. 643). As Sidonius' experience suggests, it must have been up to landowners to negotiate the best deal they could, often using one lot of newcomers as defenders of their estates against the next wave of violence. If the new administration could tax those seizing land then it may have relieved the burden of the original landowners, giving them a reason to acquiesce in their losses. Some aristocrats found new roles as advisers to the barbarian leaders or, within a generation or two, as warriors defending the new regimes against rival states. Those prepared to compromise could certainly survive.

Sidonius' experiences also provide a reminder that the church remained with its administrative structure intact. Its estates were large and could support its clergy. The clergy were exempt from taxation and military service so there was no shortage of recruits. As Childeric, king of the Franks, put it: 'Our treasury is bankrupt and all our wealth has been transferred to the church. Only bishops have any power.' The bishops maintained rudimentary structures of control while the church was the

only institution able to administer any form of welfare. In Gaul and Italy a quarter of the church's revenue was earmarked for widows and 'the poor'. The fifth and sixth centuries saw the emergence of a range of charitable institutions, hospitals, hospices for reception of pilgrims, and orphanages, and this role of the church was to be sustained in the centuries that followed. (See the closing chapters of Brown, *Through the Eye of the Needle*, for these developments.)

This was also the age where relic cults became prominent. Miracles now became widespread. It is fascinating to contrast Augustine's dismissal of the miraculous when first converted (in 385) to his full acceptance of the phenomenon by the 420s (as described in the closing chapters of his *The City of God*). He even berates his parishioners when they don't publicize their healings. In her excellent study *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton, 1991), Valerie Flint shows how the church in Europe tolerated and even absorbed pagan 'magical' practices in order to extend its authority over the pagan masses. Some kings, Guntram of the Burgundians, ruled 561–92, for instance, claimed to be able to perform miracles, a mark of sacred kingship that persisted in France until the early nineteenth century.

While the church survived as a force for cohesion, so then did Roman law. The church used it (as the law code of the Franks put it, *ecclesia vivat iure Romano*, 'the Church lives according to Roman law'). One of the last joint achievements of the eastern and western empires had been, in fact, the Law Code issued by Theodosius II (emperor in the east 408–50). It was a definitive collection of imperial laws issued from the time of Constantine onwards, proclaimed throughout the empire in 438. Many German rulers now adopted it for their 'Roman' subjects. King Alaric II made an abridgement of the Code for his Aquitanian subjects in 506 while the Ostrogoth king Theodoric promulgated it in Italy about 500. The proclamation of a law code boosted the status of a ruler while Roman jurists found new roles as advisers. The use of Roman law also perpetuated the concept that the state should take responsibility for justice on behalf of an individual and that there were personal rights that should be protected. However, it also meant that other features of Roman society such as slavery persisted with legal support. The number of slaves, or those exploited enough to be considered to be of servile status, appears to have increased on the large estates. Slaves were also exportable commodities to the eastern Mediterranean (see Michael McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*, Cambridge, 2002, chapter 9). The trade in slaves in England was forbidden for the first time only in 1102.

The administrative functions of the church may have helped to sustain urban life but most towns in the west were mere shells of what they had been. In the north-west of the empire they had virtually ceased to exist after AD 400. The process goes hand in hand with the disappearance of coinage and the return to rudimentary bartering systems. One finds cities such as Aquileia that simply fade away (in this case after being sacked by Attila in 452). A rough wall dating from the 550s still stands around the basilica, separating it from the abandoned town. The basilica's magnificent fourth-century mosaics disappeared under the silt with which they were slowly covered (but so being preserved in the fine state they are in today). Other towns

were reduced to little more than markets for peasant exchanges, temporary barracks for soldiers on campaign, and fortified refuges to be used in times of trouble. Lugdunum (Lyon) had covered 160 hectares in its heyday—by the sixth century it was down to 20. Cathedrals might still be built in cities but in Gaul the Franks tended to build their churches on the sites of Roman estates with villages growing up later around them. Communities now centred on the courts of the Germanic kings or monasteries. This was now a rural world and its horizons were inevitably narrower than they had been.

Theodoric and the Ostrogoths in Italy

The best-documented example of how Roman and German lived alongside each other is the kingdom of the Ostrogoth Theodoric in Italy (493–526). ‘Ostrogoths’ is the name conventionally given to those Goths who had remained north of the borders of the empire under the domination of the Huns, in contrast to the forerunners of the Visigoths who had fled over the border in the 370s.

Again it is not clear how far the Ostrogoths were a clearly defined group but certainly peoples from north of the Danube migrated into the Roman empire after the collapse of Attila’s empire in the 450s, and by 484 had been united under a new leader, Theodoric. As with the Visigoths their adherence to Arianism and their own language helped maintain their sense of a separate identity from the Romans. Yet Theodoric had spent ten years of his early life as a hostage in Constantinople (461–71) and so had absorbed some elements of classical culture. The Ostrogoths were based in Thrace but from here they offered a potential threat to the eastern capital. In 488, the eastern emperor Zeno decided to protect himself by sending Theodoric to Italy to overthrow Odoacer, giving him a promise that he could remain in charge there. After enduring a long siege in Ravenna Odoacer surrendered to Theodoric but was then murdered with his family. This left Theodoric as the most powerful man in Italy and when news arrived of Zeno’s death his own men hailed him as king of Italy. He was to rule for over thirty years.

It has been estimated that Theodoric may have had a following of some 100,000 men. Archaeological and literary evidence combines to suggest they were settled mostly in the north-east of Italy, probably to protect Theodoric’s new kingdom against invasion from the north by other German tribes. Theodoric steadily consolidated his position and he is an example of a trend, typical of the period, through which a warlord transformed himself into a king whose prestige still depended on his military prowess. (The later case of Charlemagne is the classic example.) Theodoric guarded against counter-attack from the east by assuming control over Pannonia and the military highways in 505. When the Visigothic kingdom collapsed in Provence in 508 after the defeat by the Franks at Vouillé in 507 (see further below), Theodoric annexed the province and also annexed Visigothic Spain in 511. Marriage links were made with the Burgundians and Vandals and his palaces were centres of opulent display and patronage.

Theodoric's 'Roman' subjects numbered some 4 million so accommodation with them was essential. In fact, Theodoric showed much sympathy for classical civilization. After he took over Provence he wrote to its 'Roman' inhabitants, 'Having been recalled to your old freedom by the gift of God, clothe yourselves with manners befitting the toga, eschew barbarism and put aside the cruelty of your minds, because it is not fitting for you to live according to strange customs in the time of our just rule.' The Romans were encouraged to use their own laws for disputes among themselves. It helped that Theodoric took a personal interest in Rome, even restoring some of the buildings there and allowing the senators to retain their status and prestige. Although Rome, like other cities in the west, was in decline there was a revival of the city's ancient pride. Games were held when Theodoric visited the city in 500 and he brought enough grain with him to feed 3,500 of the poor for a month. Images of the former emperors were replaced by pictures of Romulus and Remus suckled by the wolf and the motto *Roma invicta*.

In short, Theodoric quickly gained the respect of Romans (even being compared by some to the emperors Trajan and Valentinian). A number, including the scholar Cassiodorus (whose letters provide one of the best sources of the reign), the senator Symmachus (descendant of the pagan Symmachus of the fourth century), and Symmachus' son-in-law, the senator and philosopher Boethius, served the regime as senior civil servants. Although the Ostrogoths were Arians, and proud of it, Theodoric tolerated orthodox Christianity and showed respect for the papacy. In Ravenna, which Theodoric made his capital, orthodox and Arian churches coexisted, though their very splendour (as in the contrasting 'orthodox' and 'Arian' baptisteries that survive) suggests some rivalry between the two churches. There was no lack of sophistication in Arian Christianity. An exquisite Gospel book, the *Codex Argenteus*, survives as well as the fine mosaics from the Arian church, now known as San Apollinare Nuovo, in Ravenna.

With time the distinction between Ostrogoth and Roman began to break down. Many Ostrogoths moved from being warriors in one generation to landowners in the next. Some took Roman names, converted to orthodox Christianity, and intermarried with the Roman nobility. Cassiodorus was able to write to some of his Gothic correspondents in Latin. By the sixth century the Ostrogoths as a group disappear, apparently absorbed into the Roman majority. The kingdom also succumbed within a few years of Theodoric's death in the chaos of the Byzantine invasion (535, see further p. 661).

Boethius and Cassiodorus

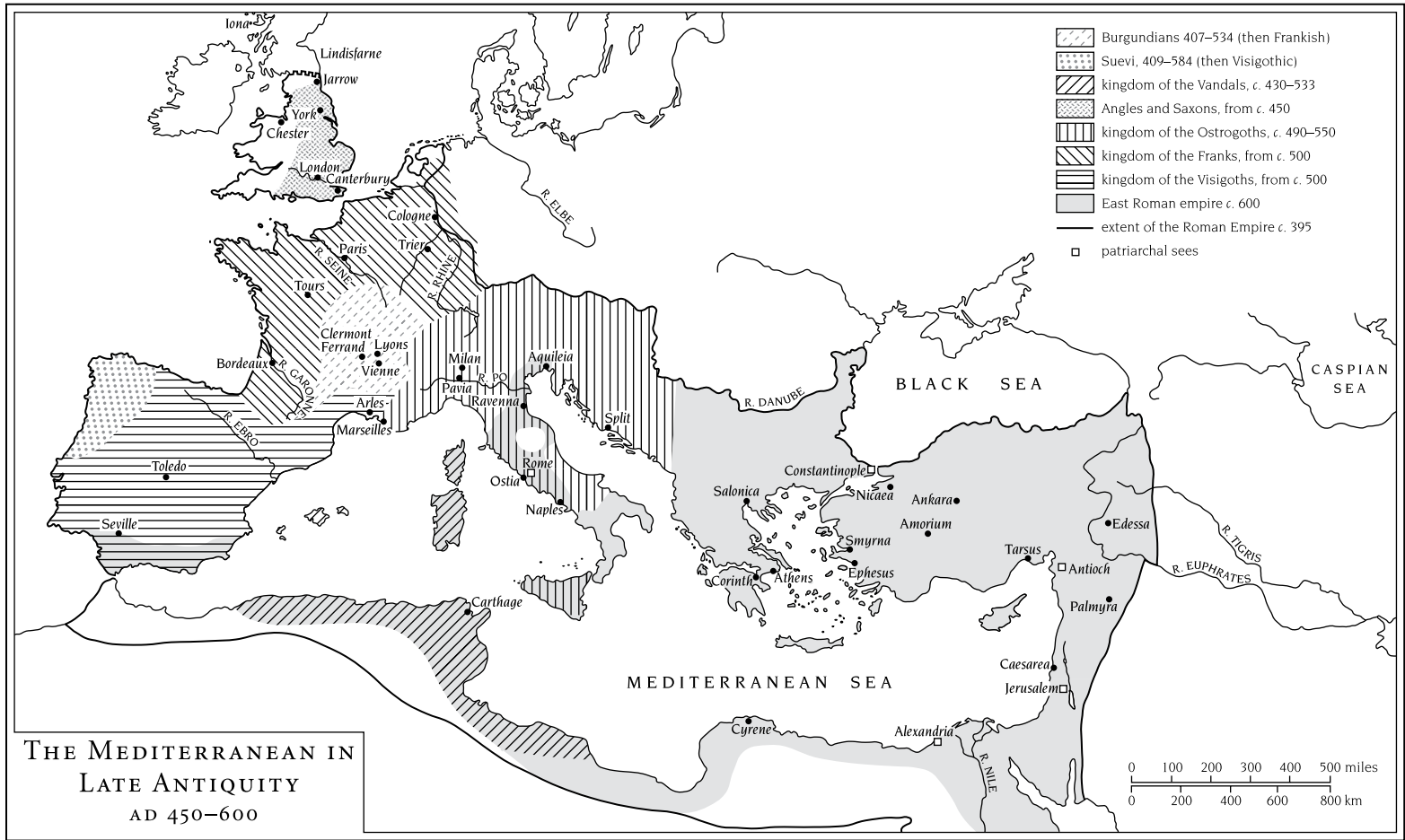
In such an atmosphere classical culture could survive and even be transmitted to future generations. The major intellectual figure of Theodoric's Italy was Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius. Boethius was from an aristocratic family that had links to at least two emperors and one bishop of Rome. He showed great intellectual promise from an early age and his life was divided between service of Theodoric

and philosophical study. Among his achievements was a translation into Latin of all Aristotle's works on logic that kept Aristotle's name alive in the medieval west when all knowledge of Greek had disappeared. Boethius had hoped to go on to translating the *Dialogues* of Plato and then show how the works of the two philosophers could be reconciled, but in 524 he was arrested on a charge of treason and bludgeoned to death after Theodoric confirmed the death sentence passed by a court in Rome. The affair is normally regarded as a black stain on Theodoric's otherwise tolerant treatment of Roman aristocrats although it is difficult to sort out the background to the accusations against Boethius and exactly what they consisted of.

It was while awaiting his death in prison that Boethius composed the work for which he is most famous, *The Consolation of Philosophy*. It is a purely classical work that, despite being religious in tone, has not a single mention of Christ or Christianity. (In fact, in one of the poems that break up the prose text Boethius praises the achievements of Agamemnon, Odysseus, and Hercules.) Boethius as he lies in prison is visited by a shadowy woman, old in years but still vigorous in spirit, who engages with him in a dialogue reminiscent of those of Plato. The background of the *Consolation* is Platonic too. Boethius is led towards an appreciation that there is a higher 'Good' which transcends his present suffering. One of the major themes explored in the *Consolation* is the apparent contradiction between the existence of an ultimate 'Good' and the everyday vagaries of fate. The individual has to lift himself above the injustices of everyday life so that he can be united with the stability of 'the Good'. (There are shades of Plotinus here.) *The Consolation of Philosophy* became one of the most read books of medieval Europe, its comparative simplicity providing an attractive contrast to the intricate quarrels of the medieval schools of philosophy. Dante claimed that it provided him with consolation after the death of his beloved Beatrice.

A century before, Augustine had argued, in his *De Doctrina Christiana*, that a training in the classics, particularly in grammar and rhetoric, was essential for any Christian, primarily to help them better understand the scriptures. The most distinguished of Theodoric's 'Roman' civil servants, Cassiodorus, agreed. Cassiodorus (480–c.585) drew on Greek models for his argument that the best training for higher studies in Christian theology was provided by the seven liberal arts, grammar, logic, rhetoric, music, geometry, arithmetic, and astronomy. When in retirement in his fifties, he founded his own monastery at Vivarium on his family estates in southern Italy. Here he collected manuscripts both Christian and pagan and encouraged the monks to copy them, even providing a manual, *De Orthographia*, to help them resolve textual difficulties. A large number of Latin authors were preserved in this way and even some Greek texts such as Eusebius' *History of the Church* and the medical works of Galen and Hippocrates. It was partly thanks to Cassiodorus that an education in pagan classical texts survived as part of the church's own education system at a time when secular schooling was in decline.

After Cassiodorus horizons narrowed so that eventually only the works of the Latin church fathers were collected. The library of the venerable Bede (672–735) in Northumbria, for instance, one that was considered important for its age, had



MAP 19

virtually no classical authors, perhaps not even a copy of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Among the 415 codices listed in the library catalogue of 821 of the monastery at Reichenau, on Lake Constance, almost none are of classical authors, although the *De Architectura* of Vitruvius and the *Georgics* and *Aeneid* of Virgil are among them (as are the works of Boethius). Many of the secular works were on Roman law. By the twelfth century no more than one work by Plato, the *Timaeus*, was available, while Aristotle was only known through one or two of his works of logic—his *Politics* reappeared in a Latin translation about 1260. The old view that monks were busily preserving the classical heritage is hard to sustain in view of the tiny proportion of classical literature that survives. Most that does appear to have originated in the court of Charlemagne (see below, p. 672).

The Frankish Kingdom

While Theodoric was holding court in Italy other Germanic peoples were successfully setting up kingdoms. As early as the fourth century the Franks had been used by the Romans to keep order on the Rhine frontier and, in the disastrous years 406–7, they played some part in resisting the influx of other German invaders. Between 430 and 440 Franks are found settled between Tournai and Cambrai and it was in Tournai in 1653 that the tomb of the early Frankish 'king' Childeric (died c.481) was found intact. The king was surrounded by a treasury of gold and silver, two great swords with scabbards inlaid with garnets, and a rich cloak, in short all the paraphernalia of royalty. Childeric's father, Merovech, gave the name Merovingian to the dynasty that followed.

It was Childeric's son Clovis (c.466–511) who was to expand the kingdom. He threw back the Alamanni towards the Upper Rhine and energetically disposed of rival kings. His shrewdest move, one that was later trumpeted as a seminal moment in French history, was to convert to orthodox Christianity, in about 506. This immediately gave him a link with the 'Roman' populations under Burgundian and Visigoth rule (the Burgundians and Visigoths remained Arians) and the support of their bishops as well as the 'orthodox' emperors in Constantinople. He now marched triumphantly into Aquitaine and, at the Battle of Vouillé in 507, defeated and killed the Visigothic king, Alaric II. By the time of his death, probably in 511, Clovis had laid the foundations of a large Frankish kingdom underpinned by orthodox Christianity.

The events of the next two centuries are confused. In his important book *The Myth of Nations* (Princeton, 2003), Patrick Geary explains how nineteenth-century nationalist historians revived legends of the Franks, Germans, and other European peoples as having a coherent ethnic identity by the fifth century. Geary shows how simplistic this view is (and how easily it was used by racists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to talk of an ancient 'pure' France or Germany). Most 'kings' may have been little more than warriors enjoying the temporary allegiances of a mass of different peoples. So Frankish history should be written in terms of leaders

controlling specific territories rather than of a Frankish nation forging its identity. After Clovis' death his kingdom was split between four of his sons although these seem to have worked together in comparative harmony. Between 533 and 548 there was once again strong centralized rule under Clovis' grandson Theudebert I. Theudebert eliminated the Burgundian kingdom in 534 and gained Provence from the Ostrogoths in 536. He also expanded north of the Rhine and even across the Alps into Italy. For the first time in European history the peoples of western Europe lived together in some form of political unity without the Rhine as a barrier between 'Germans' and others.

Theudebert deliberately cultivated an imperial presence in the old Roman style. He presided over games in the hippodrome at Arles and for his coinage adopted the eastern *solidus* (first minted by Constantine) with his name and title substituted for that of the eastern emperor. The kingdom disintegrated after Theudebert's death but was reunited again by a great-grandson of Clovis, Chlothar I, in 558. Under Chlothar II (584–629) and Dagobert (629–38) the Frankish kingdom was to survive as the most effective kingdom of the west, successfully using the Merovingian bloodline to its advantage. Many records survive of its legislation, especially of laws relating to the protection of the church.

The Visigoths in Spain and Vandals in Africa

The Visigothic kingdom in Spain had to endure annexation by the Ostrogoths and invasion by the Byzantines (see below). The peninsula fragmented so that authority passed to the local landowners before Spain re-emerged as a strong and centralized kingdom at the end of the sixth century. Leovigild (569–86) achieved the reunification of most of the peninsula through military means, finally defeating the Suevic kingdom in 585. The problem that remained was the division between the Arian Visigoths and the orthodox Christians who made up the majority of the population. Leovigild may have been edging towards conversion to orthodoxy before his death but it was his son Reccared (586–601) who took the plunge. Summoning the bishops to Toledo in 589, Reccared not only proclaimed his conversion but formed an alliance with the church through which church and state worked together to consolidate the political unity of the state. This remarkable development showed how well the authority of the Visigothic kings was accepted. As in Italy the distinction between Visigoth and Roman appears to have faded with time although it is interesting that the names of the rulers remain Gothic ones well into the seventh century. This perhaps reflects the fact that Gothic had become synonymous with elite status.

As a result of this integration, the Visigothic kingdom was to compete with the Frankish as the most stable in Europe. Their decayed cities especially those along the coast, the modern Marseilles and Barcelona among them, saw a flickering of new life as limited trade with the Byzantine east revived. The Visigothic kingdom was also intellectually fertile. The most prestigious of its scholars was Isidore, bishop

of Seville from about 600 to 636. Isidore's most influential contribution to political life was the development of a theory of Christian kingship in which the ruler must shine through the exercise of his faith. However, his contribution to scholarship was as great. In his twenty-volume *Etymologies*, Isidore collected a vast range of earlier material to serve as a foundation for the understanding of the meanings of Latin words. He was a determined advocate of a traditional classical education for the clergy, insisting that it was better for Christians that they read the pagan authors than remain ignorant of them. Like Cassiodorus in Italy, Isidore set in hand the copying of manuscripts, and classical learning was preserved as a feature of education more successfully in Spain than in any other western state. Yet there is already a sense of the classics of the past vanishing. The authors stood, Isidore said, like blue hills on the far distant horizons and he found it hard to place them even chronologically.

In contrast to these two European kingdoms, Vandal rule in Africa was less stable. The Vandals had dealt a deathblow to the empire when they cut off the grain supplies to Italy after their conquest of 439. They then created an effective navy (see earlier p. 633) and so forced the Byzantine emperors of the fifth century to treat them with respect. In Africa, they ruled as overlords, for the most part isolating themselves as garrison forces in the coastal cities. Landowners had their estates confiscated and there was bitter conflict between the local Christians, the heirs of Augustine and the Donatists, and their Arian rulers. As a result there was little hope of accommodation between Germans and Romans. It was the fate of the local Christians, written up in lurid but probably exaggerated detail by one of their bishops, Victor of Vita, that aroused the interest of the east, in particular the emperor Justinian (527–65) in Constantinople. It seems to have been his initiative, based on a desire to help the oppressed Christians as well as to make a final, if anachronistic, attempt to revive the western empire, that lay behind the decision made in 533 to invade Africa, an invasion which was astonishingly successful (see below, p. 666). It was followed by an invasion of Italy in 535.

Italy in the Late Sixth Century

The attempt to reconquer Italy from the Arian Goths was not a success. (Its events are described in Chapter 35.) Justinian had hoped to restore some form of classical, albeit Christian, civilization to the west but wars often achieve the opposite of their aims. One result of the eastern intervention in Italy was the disappearance of the senatorial aristocracy. Many were simply eliminated by the Goths as suspected traitors. In 547 the Gothic king, Totila, had taken Rome, now reduced to a population of some 30,000, and seized the treasures of the senatorial palaces. Many senators had simply fled with all they could carry. The last of the Gothic leaders, Teias, massacred some 300 children of senatorial families whom he was holding as hostages. The villa economy, on which the senators' wealth depended, also seems to have disappeared at the same time, doubtless dislocated by the protracted wars. The senate

ceased to meet in the 580s and it is in these years that the image of Rome as an abandoned city, its great monuments falling into ruin, first emerges.

There is, however, one magnificent set of survivals from these troubled years, the churches of Ravenna. The city had been the capital of the western emperors from 402 but achieved its full glory under Theodoric, one that was sustained when Ravenna came under eastern control after 540. The splendour of these churches lies in their mosaics, all the more treasured because so many works of religious art in the Byzantine east were destroyed by the iconoclasts of the eighth century. Mosaics had originally been used only on floors, but from the fifth century they were increasingly displayed on walls and vaults with the tesserae set at an angle to each other to produce a shimmering effect.

The earliest mosaics at Ravenna are to be found in the mausoleum built for herself, but never used, by Galla Placidia (425). They are Hellenistic in style, Christ as the Good Shepherd being shown relaxing among a group of sheep. When Theodoric came to build his palace church, to Christ the Redeemer (but later rededicated to St Apollinaris, by tradition the first bishop of Ravenna), in 490, he used mosaics to cover the whole length of the walls including the earliest known extant cycle of Gospel scenes. The interior is lit for effect by large windows in the clerestory. The church, now known as San Apollinare Nuovo, retains the traditional basilica shape as does a slightly later Ostrogothic church, San Apollinare in Classe (in Ravenna's port, Classis) begun in the 530s. Here again there are fine mosaics (in particular of St Apollinaris in a wooded and green landscape surrounded by sheep) in what remains one of the most harmonious of early Christian interiors.

A different and individual approach was taken in San Vitalis, begun under the Ostrogoths in the 520s. The church is essentially an octagon surmounted by a cupola (inspired by the contemporary church, which still survives, of Sts Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople) but there are the additions of a chancel and entrance porch. The interior is broken up by a series of columns and arches superimposed on each other. The whole is beautifully integrated and given even greater magnificence by its mosaics, which were added, in 548, after Justinian's reconquest of Italy. Here are the celebrated portrayals of Justinian and his consort Theodora bringing gifts to Christ, but they are only a few of the host of images and symbols that blend in with the architecture of the church.

When Justinian had finally achieved some sort of victory in Italy in 554 he attempted to reimpose an imperial system of administration, staffed by eastern officials. It was bitterly resented by the demoralized population. In any case, there was little in the way of an administrative structure left outside that provided by the church. Yet here too there was a breakdown after the rejection by most Italian clergy of Justinian's condemnation of the so-called Three Chapters, texts that supported the Nestorian view that Christ had a distinct human nature (see Chapter 35).

Up to the fifth century the bishops of Rome, though maintaining some authority in the church as a whole as the proclaimed successors of Peter, had played little part in formulating Christian doctrine. The Christian world was predominantly Greek, the great councils of the church at which doctrine had been decided took place

either at Constantinople (381, 553) or even further east (Nicaea (325), Ephesus (431), Chalcedon (451)). The dominant figures in these councils had been the emperors, who had called them and proclaimed their findings through imperial decrees, rather than the bishops. With Christianity now the official religion of the state, it mattered as much to the emperors as to the bishops that there was doctrinal unity and it was hard, in any case, to see how any resolution of complex theological issues could have been achieved without imperial backing.

Rome's attempts to exert influence were not helped by the comparative isolation of the city from the east and its own internal decay. There were individual Italian bishops, Ambrose in Milan, for instance, who found themselves closer to the western emperors, and thus, as we have seen, p. 616 above, in a position to exercise greater influence over them, than a bishop based in the shell of the 'Eternal City'. It was not until the Council of Chalcedon in 451, when the so-called *tome* (letter) of Leo was read (in his absence), that 'for the first time Rome took a determining role in the definition of Christian dogma' (Judith Herrin) and even here there was a challenge to Rome's claims to primacy when, to Leo's fury, the proclamation of 381 that Constantinople's status was second only to that of Rome was confirmed. The council held in Constantinople under Justinian's auspices in 553 conducted its business totally independently of Rome.

When in 590 a new bishop of Rome, Gregory (540–604), was consecrated, it seemed that the supremacy of the Greek east in defining Christianity would continue. Gregory had spent several years in Constantinople and had expressed some sympathy for the eastern position on doctrine. The emperors must have hoped that he could be controlled. These hopes were soon dashed. Gregory was a Roman aristocrat (in fact a former City Prefect) and was defined by his class as a patrician figure of the old school. His affection and concern for the city remained strong and his benevolence unquestioned. He fed Rome's often starving population from his own estates. Despite his stay in Constantinople he was not learned in Greek and represented the new clerical culture of the west, in which learning in the Latin classics was combined with a devout and somewhat austere Christianity, but remained always subservient to it. His happiest days, he recalled, were those when he was living as a monk in a community he had founded in Rome.

Gregory is undoubtedly one of the greatest spiritual leaders the west has ever produced. As societies disintegrated around him, he felt the challenge of living 'in the last times'. It was a matter of urgency that he should restore to Christianity a moral integrity that had risked being lost in the vindictive debates of the fourth century and the diversion of resources into opulent churches. (The Anglo-Saxon historian of the church, Bede, writing in the eighth century, noted that 'whilst the popes devoted themselves to the task of the building of churches, and adorning them with gold and silver, [Gregory's] prime concern was the saving of souls.') He knew the value of moderation in pastoral care (expressed in his most famous work the *Liber Regulae Pastoralis*, 'the Book of Pastoral Care'). It was he who endorsed the Rule of Benedict, which, in contrast to the extreme asceticism of the fourth century, accepted that measured discipline was the way forward if monasteries were to

remain settled and humane communities. His ideal pastor must, he wrote in his *Condescensio*, learn ‘to be intimately close to each person through compassion, and yet to hover above all through contemplation’. It was a nice mix. His endorsement of the Rule was perhaps the single most enduring initiative in the history of medieval Christianity.

Yet there was no compromise on papal authority. Gregory exploited his freedom from imperial control and doggedly set out on a new path that was to define the nature of western Christendom. The bishop of Rome was to be the presiding force in Christian Europe with his fellow but subordinate bishops strengthened as leaders of the Christian communities. The authority of the church rested jointly on the four Gospels and the four ecumenical councils (Nicaea, Constantinople (381), Ephesus, and Chalcedon) but ‘without the authority and consent of the apostolic see [Rome]’, insisted Gregory ‘none of the matters transacted [by a council] has any binding force’. It was a sophisticated rationale for papal power that owed much to the theology of Augustine but rested ultimately on the direct succession Gregory claimed from the apostle Peter.

So the foundations had been laid of the medieval papacy. They were reinforced by the widening doctrinal split with the east, and a growing isolation from the traditional Greek-speaking centres of Christianity as the leading members of the western church (Augustine, as has been seen, is one example) were unable any longer to work in Greek. Later, in the seventh century, Rome’s position was further strengthened by the eclipse of two traditional rivals, the bishoprics of Alexandria and Antioch, by the Arab invasions so that one can justly talk of ‘the Roman see as the single isolated, religious centre of the barbarian west’ (Robert Markus).

Yet few in the late sixth century could have predicted the later supremacy over Europe of the popes. Rome as a city was by now isolated, little more than a few churches encircling the ruined centre. By the 570s another set of invaders from the north, the Lombards, had overrun many of the larger Italian cities and Gregory had only the most fragile of contacts with the rest of Europe. The mission he sent to England that initiated the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons was in the circumstances a magnificent achievement, even though Christ became a warrior god for the rulers of the combative Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. The acceptance of papal authority was slow (the Irish St Columban was still arguing in the seventh century that if any one bishop had the right to exert supreme authority in the church that was surely the bishop of Jerusalem), but there is no doubt that Gregory’s reign marks a turning point in the history of Christianity and it is a fitting point with which to end this chapter.

Not least of the achievements of Gregory and his fellow bishops was to ensure the survival of classical Latin as the language of church law and administration in the Middle Ages and beyond. There was also a more colloquial Latin, the language of ordinary people of the empire. (In 813 a council of bishops at Tours ruled that sermons had to be in *rustica romana lingua*, colloquial Latin while, presumably, the rest of the service continued in classical Latin.) It was from these local dialects that the Romance languages appear to have emerged in those areas where the Roman

population was a majority, the Iberian peninsula, Italy, France, and Romania. A barrier between these areas and those further north where German became the majority language has lasted from the sixth century to the present day and is a fine reminder that despite the collapse of the empire its legacy in Europe persisted.

Historians should always be sensitive to continuity. Yet the framework of life in the early medieval centuries was dramatically different from that of the classical world. While secular rulers struggled to keep their authority, the church consolidated hers in the west through the well-established network of bishops, many of them from the former Roman aristocracy. To a large extent Christianity successfully accommodated itself politically with the emerging dynasties and the warlord mentalities of the age. Christ is now predominantly a warrior sanctioning success in battle, in this sense not very different from the Roman gods of war. Once again Christianity was absorbing pagan values rather than vice versa.

Yet, in contrast to Roman religion, there was an increasing preoccupation with preparation for the afterlife and the rise of the patron saint as a mediator at the court of the Last Judgement. Relics become important symbols of prestige, offering protection to cities as they struggled to keep their identity in a precarious world. In place of the vibrant pagan mythologies, a new set of mythologies based on the holy deeds of saints or the miracles of relics take their place. This was indeed a new world, no less fascinating than the old but markedly different from it. (See Charles Freeman, *Holy Bones, Holy Dust: How Relics Shaped the History of Medieval Europe*, New Haven, 2011, which begins the story in AD 300.)

Cultural Complexity in the East

The half of the empire to which the young emperor Arcadius succeeded in 395 was one of some geographical and cultural complexity. It included not only the Danube provinces, as far west as to include Illyricum, the Balkans, and Greece, but also Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt in the eastern Mediterranean. Latin remained as a language of the army and law. Some emperors, such as Justin I and Justinian, came from a predominantly Latin cultural background and the language was kept up by the courtiers and lawyers of the imperial palace in Constantinople. However, the language of administration was Greek, which had spread widely in the east after Alexander's conquests. Antioch, the second city of the empire, and Alexandria were both Greek speaking and, as former capitals of the Seleucid and Ptolemaic monarchies, prided themselves on a Greek heritage that was much older and richer than that of Constantinople.

Although Greek had spread outside the cities (and is found as the normal language of inscriptions even in rural areas) local cultures had become more prominent since the third century. Christianity was a religion where the written text was important and minority languages developed their own Christian literature. Syriac was used for a wide variety of such writings, including lives of the saints, sermons, and church histories. Greek texts were translated into Syriac and vice versa while Syriac texts were in their turn translated into Armenian, Georgian, and, even in later times, into Arabic. In Palestine the Jewish teachers understood Greek but debated in Hebrew and conversed in Aramaic. In Egypt Coptic, which is essentially Egyptian written in a Greek script, had appeared in the late third century as the medium used by the Christian church to communicate with the Egyptian-speaking masses. Many Egyptians were bilingual in Greek and Coptic and Coptic became more widespread century by century until the Arab invasions of the seventh century. The mass of linguistic Christianities hampered any form of Christian uniformity and made the nuances of theological debates even more perplexing.

Yet despite its cultural complexity the eastern part of the empire saw itself as the proud heir of Rome. Its inhabitants called themselves *Romaioi*, or Romans, right up to the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in AD 1453. The fact that an empire with its own distinct ethos emerged in this area and sustained itself as a multicultural entity for over a thousand years was a remarkable achievement and

the comments of the Irish historian William Lecky writing in 1869 that 'Of the Byzantine empire, the universal verdict of history is that it constitutes, with scarcely an exception, the most thoroughly debased and despicable form that civilization has yet assumed' has long been superseded. In fact over the next thousand years the empire showed much resilience in resisting the attacks of surrounding peoples and empires. A scholarly elite survived in Constantinople for centuries. Even though there was relatively little original new literature, it is through their careful copying of Greek texts, for instance, that so much of the work of Plato, Euclid, Sophocles, and Thucydides has been saved. Constantinople fell only once, in 1204, before 1453 and, ironically, that was to an army of Christian crusaders who looted it of its treasured relics, claiming that the Greeks were heretics and unworthy of them.

Constantinople and the Christian Emperors

So long as imperial rule had survived in Italy Constantinople could not be the true capital of the empire, but by endowing it with a senate, one of the empire's two consuls, and its own grain supply (the *annona*) on the Roman model, Constantine had ensured that it was the natural successor to Rome as government in the west collapsed. At first Constantinople had few Christian buildings but the announcement after the Council of Constantinople (381) that its bishop was second only to the bishop of Rome, a decision which offended Rome and Alexandria in particular, gave it the status of a Christian capital. This was enhanced by the steady accumulation of relics. Those of the first Christian martyr, Stephen, were welcomed into the city with great ceremony in 419 and the emperors also accumulated an impressive collection of relics from the Passion of Christ. Pulcheria, the saintly sister of the emperor Theodosius II, had an especial veneration for the Virgin Mary who absorbed the attributes of the pagan goddesses of the city. (See Vasiliki Limberis, *Divine Heiress: The Virgin Mary and the Making of Christian Constantinople*, London and New York, 2012.)

Under the long reign of Theodosius II (408–50) in particular, Constantinople was consolidated as the centre of administration for the east. The population grew steadily and Theodosius built a massive line of walls, one of the most impressive surviving constructions of the ancient world, to defend the larger city. For the first time the emperors come to reside permanently in the Great Palace and court ceremonies become part of the life of the city. The most tumultuous of these ceremonies were the settings for the meetings of the emperor with his people in the vast hippodrome that had been built by Constantine alongside the palace. Gladiator fights had by now died out and the races were of chariots, but the games had a serious political aspect. The emperor was on display and could be acclaimed or derided by the city's population. The integration of the crowds into political life, particularly in the charged atmosphere of the races, where two factions, the Blues and the Greens, championed opposing teams of charioteers, brought an explosive element to city life and several emperors found themselves the focus of massive unrest when they misjudged the popular mood.

In the fourth century Eusebius, the historian of the reign of Constantine, had developed a model of Christian kingship. The emperor was God's representative on earth. God regulates the cosmic order, the emperor the social order, bringing his subjects together in a harmony that mirrors the one that God has designed for all creation. This was the ideology adopted by Constantine's fifth-century successors. In Theodosius' reign the image of imperial sanctity was reinforced by Pulcheria, who, while her brother (aged 7 at the time of his accession) was a minor, took the traditional Roman title of Augusta and maintained her position on Theodosius' death by marrying his successor, Marcian (emperor 450–7). The continuing importance in the eastern Orthodox churches (a capital 'O' denotes the distinct eastern churches, e.g. Greek or later Russian Orthodox churches which were now emerging) of a single ruler as one chosen by God contrasted strongly with the situation in the west where bishops of Rome such as Gregory (see earlier, p. 648) were determined to consolidate their authority independently of state control.

Marcian had no heir and it was the *magister militum*, a German, Aspar, who determined his successor, Leo I (457–74). There was still, after all these centuries of imperial rule, no agreed procedure for arranging the succession. The emperor could be the nominee of the armies or German strong men. Leo was the first of the emperors to be crowned by the bishop, now officially Patriarch, of Constantinople, a ceremony that took place before 'the people' in the hippodrome. Leo was far-seeing enough to try to reduce the dependency of the empire on 'barbarian' troops by recruiting a native mountain people, the Isaurians, instead. It turned out to be a choice fraught with its own difficulties. The Isaurians had long been ostracized for their lawlessness and had been highly disruptive during the troubles of the third century. (The 'sophisticated' citizens of Constantinople had the habit of assailing visiting Isaurians with stones.) Even so, Leo married his daughter Ariadne to one of their military leaders, Zeno, who then succeeded Leo as emperor in 474. Zeno's was a particularly unstable reign. He faced major challenges from rival factions of his native Isaurians as well as renewed pressures in Thrace from the Goths. As seen earlier, it was during his reign that the western empire slipped out of imperial control.

When Zeno died in 491 his widow made the choice of emperor. It was of a courtier, Anastasius, who was already 61 years old. Anastasius came from Epirus, on the fringes of the Latin-speaking world. He was a fine administrator whose career had included a period in Egypt. He married Ariadne and then consolidated his position by crushing the Isaurians. He proved a devout man described in one source as 'the good emperor, the lover of monks and the protector of the poor and afflicted', in short a truly Christian emperor. Spiritually, he was drawn to Monophysitism (for which see below) but reluctant to impose his beliefs on others. The people of Constantinople, however, who always expected the emperor to be their own, were offended by his lack of religious orthodoxy and the clear preference he showed for the eastern provinces, in particular Syria.

Anastasius' most impressive achievement was the steady accumulation of capital. Gold was the favoured metal of the empire drawn from sources in the Balkans, Armenia, and apparently, in the sixth century, from the Sudan. One pound of gold

was made up of 72 *solidi*, the coins first minted by Constantine that were to survive as a stable unit of currency for several hundred years. When Anastasius died there were 32,000 pounds of gold in the imperial treasury. The cache was the result of an effective and steady administration of an empire that remained relatively prosperous. Although the evidence for this prosperity remains fragmentary, archaeological research has uncovered a flourishing area of olive oil cultivation along the Syrian limestone massif, for instance, while in the Hauran and Negev areas in Syria and Palestine there are signs of new areas being taken into cultivation as population increased. Trade continued along an axis from Egypt and north Africa to Constantinople even after the collapse of the west. *Solidi* have been found on sites from Sweden to the Ukraine and in Ceylon they were said to be favoured above Persian silver. The levels of economic activity seem to be as high in AD 600 as they were 200 years earlier. (See the good overviews by John Haldon, 'Economy and Administration: How Did the Empire Work?' and Kenneth Holum, 'The Classical City in the Sixth Century', chapters 2 and 4 in Michael Maas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, Cambridge, 2005.)

This prosperity was tapped through an effective consolidation of the administration, with a shift of power towards provincial governors at the expense of the town councils, which were by now in decay. The classical city entered a period of decline and disintegration, similar to that seen in the west. The sources talk of the vigour being sucked out of urban life. 'Now we have no more meetings, no more debates, no more gatherings of wise men in the agora, nothing more of all that made our city famous', lamented Basil of Caesarea in the late fourth century. A city such as Aphrodisias, always vulnerable to earthquakes, was able to repair the damage caused by them in the fourth and fifth centuries. In the seventh the resources and will to build have evaporated and the buildings are left to lie in ruins. By the eleventh century Venetian captains are being encouraged to pick up discarded columns from among the detritus of dead classical cities—many of them still embellish the portals of St Mark's, the city's opulent basilica. There was a corresponding rise in the influence of the church, by now in itself a major landowner.

The taxation system remained unbalanced and harsh. Senators were exempt from some taxes while the heaviest burden seems to have fallen on the peasantry. There are accounts of recalcitrant taxpayers being flogged or imprisoned and their children sold into slavery. Through sheer ruthlessness the system worked well enough to transform surplus produce (payments of which could be commuted into gold) into the means by which the army and administration could be financed. A supply of free corn to Constantinople was also maintained, much of it coming from Egypt.

The Defence of the Empire

The heaviest financial burden on the state was that of defence, as much as 75 per cent of the total budget in times of war. The empire remained under continuous military threat. While Constantinople itself was virtually impregnable, the Danube

provinces to the west were not and were ravaged by a succession of Goths, Huns, and, later, Bulgars, Avars, and Slavs. Yet, unlike in the west, the defence policy of the eastern empire never became dictated by outsiders. The people of Constantinople made the point in 400 when they launched a successful uprising against the city garrison, which was under the command of a Goth, Gainas, who appears to have had the ambition to become an eastern Stilicho. Gainas was killed. The lesson was learnt and no emperor allowed a military strong man to take his place. The court of the eastern empire remained civilian rather than military in temper and mixed diplomacy with military confrontation.

Perhaps, as a result, the strategy of dealing with the barbarians was often muddled and inconsistent. An agreement was made with the Visigoth Alaric (397) but it was then repudiated. Similarly Attila's Huns were bought off by Theodosius II (to the tune of 6,000 pounds of gold in 443) but on Theodosius' death Marcian refused to continue paying. The eastern empire was fortunate in that in both cases the barbarians then headed to the west, adding to the overwhelming pressures on that part of the empire (see earlier, p. 634). There was little the east was able to offer the west in support. The one major attempt at intervention, the invasion of Africa in 468, was a disastrous failure. When Odoacer deposed the last of the western emperors in 476 he was allowed to survive through default. His overthrow at the hands of Theodoric the Ostrogoth was not as a result of the eastern empire's strength but, instead, its weakness in not being able to remove Theodoric from its own territory in any other way than granting him a free rein in Italy (see above p. 639).

The empire also faced a continuing threat from the east. The Persian Sasanian empire remained powerful and prided itself on its cultural superiority over the Romans. (It saw the Roman empire as the moon in comparison to itself as the sun.) Neither side was now set on the conquest of the other but tensions persisted. There was continuous dispute over the definition of the borders between the empires in Mesopotamia. Further north, Armenia, traditionally a buffer state, also proved a catalyst for mistrust. Armenia had been Christian since the early fourth century and was increasingly orientated towards the west. The Persians, resentful that Armenia's autonomy was being compromised, tried in return to impose their own cultural and religious values.

The Persians were also, like the Romans, under intense pressure from the north from nomadic peoples, notably the Huns. This made Lazica, on the eastern edge of the Black Sea, another cockpit of tension. The Persians feared that if they did not control the area nomads would use its passes to attack the fertile lands along the Caspian Sea. The Romans, in their turn, feared the Persians would use the passes to penetrate into the Black Sea, giving them the opportunity of threatening Constantinople. There were border raids, threats, and attempts to buy influence over the border tribes by both sides that kept ancient suspicions alive. Nevertheless the relative lack of major conflict did allow the eastern provinces of the empire some peace and, as has been seen, some prosperity in the fifth and sixth centuries.

Christianity in the Eastern Empire

Theodosius I had launched a determined attack on paganism but many areas of the eastern empire still remained pagan and only gradually absorbed Christianity. In fifth-century Athens it was still possible for a Platonist such as Proclus to have his own school and conduct his own pagan rituals, including prayer to Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine, whose temple remained in use. The Athenian school of philosophy survived in fact into the sixth century when it was finally closed down by Justinian and the philosophers dispersed to Persia. (See chapter 5, 'The Closing of the Athenian Schools', in Edward Watts, *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria*, Berkeley and London, 2006.)

However, classical Greek culture was on the defensive. By the late fourth century the *gymnasia* of the Greek world had disappeared. There was a marked decline in the use of books and church leaders freely abused 'philosophers' and the Greek tradition of empirical thought. In this Christianity linked itself back to older traditions of pre-scientific thinking which had, of course, always predominated in everyday life and which could find support from Paul's attack on the 'wisdom of the wise'. Local temples continued to be closed down by determined bishops or sacked by vigilante groups made up of monks. They had been given full backing by Theodosius' legislation of the early 390s. Alexandria saw widespread violence between Christian and pagan, both sides incensed by what were seen as attacks on their religious beliefs by the other. The centuries-old culture of pharaonic Egypt was also finally stifled. The temple of Isis at Philae was closed in AD 536 and at Karnak wall paintings and reliefs were covered with rough plaster and the temple buildings adapted to the use of convents and monasteries. 'See what blessings God's Christ came to bestow on us, since through His teachings in the gospels he has redeemed even the souls of the Egyptians from such a disease of lasting and continued blindness so that most of the people of Egypt have been freed from this insanity,' exulted the church historian Eusebius.

The spread of Christianity was inseparable from its absorption of pagan values and culture. In the cities it was the bishops who assumed the responsibilities of the old classical elites. As in the west bishops tended to come from the traditional ruling classes and preserved the *paideia*, the civilized ways of behaviour of a leisured elite for whom personal relationships were an art form in themselves. Once elected they held office for life so could parade themselves as typical aristocrats. Bishops' palaces became increasingly resplendent, very similar to the palaces of local governors, and were now built in the centres of cities. Such energetic building programmes echoed those of the Greek cities of the second century (and might even include baths and bridges). There remained a tension between the bishops' role as builders of churches opulently adorned with fine marbles and mosaics and their explicitly Christian role of providing for the poor. When a bishop failed to conduct himself appropriately he became very vulnerable. It was the clumsiness of John Chrysostom, the bishop of Constantinople, in

exercising diplomatic and personal skills that led to his falling out with the court and his expulsion from office in 405 despite the tumultuous support of the poor. (See the studies by Rapp and Brown cited on p. 614.)

The demise of the old city governments also left the bishops responsible for the maintenance of order. Some were appointed *defensor civitatis*, ‘judge of the city’. So it was that the bishop of Antioch excused his late arrival at the Council of Ephesus in 431 on the grounds that he had been busy suppressing riots and another bishop of Antioch wrote to a colleague, ‘It is the duty of bishops like you to cut short and to restrain any unregulated movements of the mob.’ On occasion bishops even had to defend their cities against marauding bands of monks. By the sixth century, bishops were expected to help oversee the audit of city finances and pass on protests against provincial governors to the emperor. They were encouraged to act as the moral guardians of the secular administration.

A glimpse of the relationship between church and state can be seen in surviving records from southern Egypt. When raids into the empire from Nubia caused a mass of refugees to flee northwards up the Nile the abbot Shenoute took responsibility for feeding them for three months from the bake-houses of his monastery. His gesture was recognized by the imperial authorities, who granted him a tax exemption on the lands of his monastery. Again, further south, on the exposed frontier itself, bishop Apion of Syene is found petitioning the emperor for more troops with which to protect his churches and people. The petition went all the way to Theodosius II, was endorsed by him in his own hand, and then sent to the military commander of southern Egypt for action. In both cases church initiatives receive state responses.

The newly agreed Christian orthodoxy of AD 381 (see above, p. 615) was difficult to impose. ‘Arianism’ in its various forms remained strong and there were many Christian communities (especially, inscriptions show, in Anatolia—the work of Stephen Mitchell in his *Anatolia: Land, Men and Gods in Asia Minor*, 2 volumes, Oxford, 1995, is excellent on this) where local traditions of Christian worship were resistant to decrees from far-off emperors. Now a new controversy arose. It was over the nature of Christ. His divinity had been emphasized by the Nicene creed, now established as orthodoxy (small ‘o’ is used here to describe approved doctrine), but while the Nicene creed had settled one problem it highlighted another, the extent to which a Jesus elevated to consubstantiality with the Father could combine divine and human natures. Nestorius, installed as bishop of Constantinople in 428, argued that Christ was one person but with human and divine natures coexisting in the same body. Nestorius himself tended to emphasize the human nature of Christ, stressing, for instance, that when Christ suffered on the cross he did so as a human being (otherwise what had Christ actually had to go through to save us?). Nestorius was bitterly opposed by Cyril, bishop of Alexandria, whose own interpretation was that Christ, while appearing in human form, was predominantly divine. (This conflict was intensified by the bitterness of Alexandria over the elevated status of Constantinople.) Those who emphasized the divinity of Christ were later to be known as Monophysites. Intertwined with this dispute was the complementary one over

the correct title for Mary. Cyril and Monophysites wished to proclaim Mary as *Theotokos*, bearer of God, Nestorius preferred *Anthropotokos*, man-bearer, but was prepared to compromise with Christ-bearer.

These debates were intensified by the granting of tax exemptions and patronage to those who accepted what was defined by the emperor of the time as orthodoxy. Disputes over doctrine could easily degenerate into struggles over the control of resources. As Gregory of Nazianzus observed of a conflict between two rival bishops: 'The pretext was souls, but in fact it was desire for control... of taxes and contributions which have the whole world in miserable confusion.' These disputes risked upsetting the good order of the empire, one reason why the emperors played such a major role in enforcing an agreed orthodoxy and were so eager to use councils as a means of settling them. A council held in Ephesus (where by tradition Mary had spent her later life) in 431 accepted the concept of Mary as *Theotokos*, thus by implication condemning Nestorius. (It is interesting that the dismantling of the vast temple of Diana, a rival goddess no less, appears to have taken place at this time.) Nestorius, who had been locked out of the Council by Cyril, was forced into exile for the rest of his life and Theodosius ordering the burning of his writings in 435. The issue was still not settled, however. A second Council of Ephesus, held in 449, took the Monophysite position which was imposed by force on the assembled bishops by Dioscorus, the new bishop of Alexandria. The Council was immediately condemned by the bishop of Rome, Leo I, as 'a robber council'.

These two councils had, in fact, operated largely free of imperial control, but the new emperor, Marcian, had learned the lesson. He summoned another council, this time at Chalcedon across the Bosphorus from Constantinople, in 451. Marcian himself presided at key sessions. Hailed as the 'new Constantine', he made sure that the proceedings were rigorously controlled by imperial officials. Finally a formula was drawn up. Christ was proclaimed to have the two natures, human and divine (a phrase taken from Leo), within the same undivided person. This was, in fact, close to what Nestorius had argued in the first place. As a concession to the supporters of Cyril of Alexandria, Mary's title as *Theotokos*, 'Mother of God', was confirmed.

The Chalcedonian formula was welcomed by the west (and remains orthodoxy in the western churches to this day). Leo, who did not attend the Council himself, benefited by seeing many of his own views incorporated into the formula and a confirmation that ultimately the bishop of Rome had supremacy over all other bishops. However, he took offence at the confirmation that the bishop of Constantinople should be second in authority only to the bishop of Rome. This decision was equally unpalatable to the bishops of Alexandria and Antioch.

There were other lasting tensions. By taking a compromise position the Council of Chalcedon had isolated extremists of each side. One group, taking its inspiration from theologians of the east Syrian city of Edessa, continued to emphasize the distinct human nature of Christ. (They are sometimes called the Nestorians, but their emphasis on Christ's humanity was more pronounced than anything put forward by Nestorius.) They eventually formed the separate 'Church of the East', most of whose adherents were in Persia. The church survived successfully for many

centuries, even managing to send missionaries as far east as China in the thirteenth century. Meanwhile the Monophysite position claimed the adherence of many in Syria and Egypt and separate churches, the Coptic and Syrian Orthodox churches, eventually emerged.

The Council of Chalcedon had therefore succeeded in creating a religious division that made a nonsense of the emperor as ruler of a people united in a single church. The whole debate had been marked by high levels of violence and intimidation and any further compromise was to prove impossible. The Monophysites, in particular, were intransigent and any move to accommodate them within the church now risked offending the church in the west. The foundations had been laid for final breakdown between eastern and western Christianity, the schism of 1054, which persists to this day.

Justinian

On the death of Anastasius in 518 a 70-year-old Latin-speaking soldier from the Balkans, Justin, the commander of the palace guards, became emperor. Virtually illiterate himself, he groomed his sophisticated nephew Justinian as his successor and Justinian duly succeeded in 527. So began one of the most memorable reigns (527–65) of late antiquity. Justinian inherited a stable and prosperous state but was haunted by the loss of the west especially as it had fallen under the control of heretical tribes. He had a vision of how he could raise it to new heights of glory through the revival of a Roman empire incorporating its old capital and whatever else could be regained of the west. It would be united under a single orthodox Christianity with the Arianism of the barbarian successor kingdoms destroyed. This was history-making on a grand scale, but despite the underlying stability and prosperity of the state it was carried out against a backdrop of continued pressures from both the east and north and, less predictably, natural disasters of earthquakes, drought, and plague. The final effect of Justinian's awesome ambitions may well have been to weaken the empire and the question remains as to how much Justinian himself has to shoulder the blame for this. Responsibility was not his alone. The influence over him of his beautiful, worldly-wise, and supremely self-confident wife Theodora, whom he raised from mistress to empress, must have been strong.

Justinian's Law Codes

The first 'great' achievement of Justinian was his codification of Roman law. Over the preceding 500 years Roman law had become an unwieldy accumulation of imperial decrees interspersed with the opinions of jurists. The result was a mass of contradictions and uncertainties. For Justinian a unified system of law, based on Roman tradition, was essential to the security of the state and the consolidation of his own authority. In 528 he set codification in hand. It was masterminded by a

senior administrator, Tribonian, a man of great erudition and intellectual energy. The work was completed in three parts. The *Code* brought together all imperial decrees in a single volume. Henceforth, only those cited in the *Code* could be used in the courts. A first version of the *Code* was ready as early as 529 but what now survives is a second version promulgated in 534. The *Digest* is a compilation and rationalization of the opinions of jurists. Three million words of opinion were reduced and consolidated into a million.

The *Digest* was a symbol of Justinian's determination to bring an administrative unity to his empire based on Roman, not Greek, principles. It also had an ideological purpose, to present the emperor as the ultimate source of all law and so, as critics within the civil service were complaining at the time, potentially a tyrant. In order that there should be no confusion Justinian forbade any further commentaries on these opinions. They had to be used as they were without further interpretation (though translations into Greek were allowed). In order that lawyers would be able to use the *Code* and *Digest*, a separate volume, the *Institutes*, was drawn up to serve as a textbook for students. The *Digest* and *Institutes* were promulgated in 533. They were all in Latin while a collection of the subsequent imperial legislation was in Greek, a sign of the transition to a Greek-speaking empire (see further below, pp. 666–7) as well as a recognition that law was not static but continually evolving as new challenges arose.

Surprisingly this eminent proclamation of imperial authority survives only in one single sixth-century copy. This re-emerged in Italy in 1070 where its importance was soon recognized by the burgeoning city-states. (The copy is now in the Biblioteca Laurenziana in Florence.) The *Digest* proved particularly influential in the Italian city-states for its recognition of property rights and the equality of persons before the law and later became part of the legal tradition of countries as varied as South Africa, France, and Germany.

The Nika Riots

To centralize and simplify his administration Justinian chose ruthless ministers. The most prominent was John the Cappadocian, a poorly educated but determined man who had no respect for the privileged. The fifth century had seen a growth in the number of large aristocratic estates and their owners had manipulated the taxation systems in their favour, often by acquiring the privilege of supervising the collection of taxes themselves! John set to work to destroy these tax exemptions they enjoyed and the cosy relationship many of them had established with the civil service. Bishops were further empowered by being allowed to report cases of corruption to the capital while provincial governors were ordered to stand up to the local magnates. Those who continued to defy John could even be subjected to the humiliating ordeal of being flogged. Meanwhile the civil service was slimmed down and, in breach of the traditions established by Constantine, some civil and military posts were combined.

Not surprisingly John's rigour aroused discontent among the professional classes. In 532 they found growing support among the population of Constantinople, who were unsettled by food shortages. Violence from the rival Blue and Green teams in the hippodrome might have been contained by encouraging each faction to focus their traditional hostility towards each other, but a bungled attempt by the authorities at hanging one Green and one Blue supporter led to the factions combining against the government (with cries of 'Nika', victory). There was widespread rioting and the crowds, whose political perspectives remained highly conventional, attempted to install a rival emperor. Justinian wavered. He dismissed John the Cappadocian and Tribonian and appeared in the imperial box to take the blame, all without avail. He would have fled the city if the empress Theodora had not stiffened his resolve with her famous statement that a winding sheet of imperial purple was as good as any other. It was the generals, Belisarius and Narses among them, who now came to the fore. The hippodrome was stormed and an appalling massacre, of perhaps some 30,000 of the city population, was carried out only a few yards from the imperial palace. Justinian was saved.

No emperor of imperial Rome had ever treated the people of his capital in such a ruthless way and the experience must have been a sobering one. How it related to Justinian's decision to launch his expedition to Africa in 533 is not clear. Although his personal knowledge of military affairs was limited, Justinian was no stranger to war. The first years of his reign had been marked by a series of campaigns along the Persian frontiers from Lazica in the north to Arabia in the south. At the same time he had conducted a defence of the Danube borders and engaged in conflicts with the Huns along the Black Sea coast. The empire had been able to sustain the cost and now the ambition of regaining the west and 'rescuing' orthodox Christians from the persecutions of Arians became more prominent. Already in 532–3 an 'Endless Peace' had been made with the new Persian leader, Khrusro. Underwritten by a large payment of tribute it left Justinian free to move westwards. The Nika riots may have strengthened his determination, either by giving him a sense of omnipotence or by providing him with a reason for rebuilding his popularity with the masses. Whatever the motives, campaigns to Africa and Italy were now set in hand.

The Campaigns in Africa and Italy

As the emperor's advisers, aware of the debacle in 468 (see above, p. 636), warned him, an expedition to Vandal Africa was a risky enterprise but in the event their fears proved unjustified. Justinian's general Belisarius landed in the bay of Tunis with 10,000 infantry and 5,000 cavalry. A revolt had been provoked beforehand in Sardinia that diverted many of the Vandal troops there. As a result the Vandals' control of Africa collapsed after two battles and all traces of their presence soon disappeared, another indication of how shallow were the roots of their occupation. (It is assumed that the defeated Vandals were gradually absorbed into their conquerors' armies.) The Vandal king, Gelimer, was taken back to Constantinople

where he was paraded in a triumph reminiscent of those of republican Rome. The local population rejoiced at their liberation but now found themselves, somewhat incongruously, under a Greek-speaking administration. Heavy taxation and the raids of nomadic tribes hindered the return of the province's natural prosperity, which does not seem to have been assured until the seventh century. Eastern control survived until the Arab conquest of north Africa in the late seventh century.

In 535 Justinian, buoyed up by his success in Africa, attempted an invasion of Italy. His motives, the elimination of Arianism and the restoration of the western empire, remained the same, but everything was different in Italy. The country was difficult to fight in, the Ostrogoths were resilient, while the local population was ambivalent about being rescued by Greek-speaking easterners. Furthermore the invading force, once again under Belisarius, was only half the size of that sent to Africa. In all the war was to drag on for almost twenty years. Belisarius found himself besieged in Rome (the cutting of the aqueducts by the Goths finally closed the city's great baths) and was only relieved when a second force, still only 5,000-strong, managed to reach the Ostrogoth capital, Ravenna. Complex negotiations eventually resulted in the surrender of the city in 540 but no permanent settlement was made and the Ostrogoths still retained the cities of northern Italy. War soon broke out again just at a time when Justinian faced pressures on his own eastern borders from the Persians. Victory for the east came only in 554, but soon afterwards northern Italy was invaded by the Lombards, who drove out the eastern armies and established their own kingdom in the Po valley, which was to last until 774 (and which still sends echoes to northern separatists today). The empire retained control only of Rome, Ravenna, a fragile corridor between them, and a scatter of cities and fortresses. The historian Procopius (see below) details the widespread starvation of the local population that accompanied the wars. Justinian's attempt to revive a western empire had done much to destroy the very society he had been determined to preserve and, apart from an intervention in a Visigothic civil war in Spain, his overseas adventures were over.

Procopius of Caesarea

The fullest source for the early part of Justinian's reign is that provided by the historian Procopius from (Palestinian) Caesarea, a cosmopolitan city, with Jewish and Christian communities and celebrated as a centre of education that was still, as excavations on the waterfront have shown, bustling with trade in the sixth century. Procopius was born into the Christian upper classes but nothing is known of his life until he surfaces in 527 on the staff of Justinian's most gifted general, Belisarius. It was the career of Belisarius that gave him his opportunity to see, at first hand, fighting in the east, the great expedition to Africa, and the longer campaign in Italy (536–40). By 542, at the latest, Procopius was in Constantinople and spent much of the rest of his life there. He may have returned to Italy in 546–7 but he had fallen out of the emperor's favour and does not seem to have held any other official post. There is no work of his that can be proved to be written after 554.

Procopius left three main works. The most substantial is his account of Justinian's wars in the east, Africa, and Italy. *The Wars* is primarily a narrative with a mass of detail on the armies, battles, and personalities involved, much of it gathered at first hand. Procopius' model is Thucydides. He even provides a detailed account of the devastating plague in Constantinople which is reminiscent of that described by Thucydides in Athens. As with Thucydides, Procopius' strength lies in the vivid depiction of great events and at first his story has all the excitement it needs, as Procopius' hero, Belisarius, destroys the Vandals and returns home to Constantinople to celebrate his victory. In the later volumes, however, with a Persian sack of Antioch, the outbreak of plague (see below), and stalemate in Italy, Procopius' optimism fades and his disillusionment with imperial policy grows stronger. He, like so many of his class, was naturally suspicious of the ambitions and autocracy of an emperor (at one point he compares Justinian to Domitian) and his resentments were piled up to be eventually vented in his *Secret History*, composed perhaps around 550 (before he had finished *The Wars*). This, the best known of Procopius' works, is a vitriolic tirade against Justinian (and to some extent Belisarius) though it is most often read for its descriptions of the alleged sexual cavortings of the empress Theodora in her early life as a circus artiste. The *Secret History* was never intended to be published during Justinian's lifetime and contrasts with the third of Procopius' surviving works on Justinian's building programme (*Buildings*). This is a straightforward panegyric, probably also written in the early 550s, in which the achievements of the emperor as patron of such majestic buildings as St Sophia and other churches (but also of a vast range of fortifications) are praised.

Procopius was writing consciously within classical Greek literary traditions. Both the invective and the panegyric were recognized forms to which a writer could turn when it suited his purpose. Averil Cameron has deconstructed Procopius' works to show that they have an underlying unity within this tradition. Procopius was writing for an elitist minority who understood the conventions and who would not have been as disturbed by the disparity between the three surviving works as later generations have been. The tradition was a constraining one, however. It focused on secular history in a period when religious debate was endemic and spiritual power a major element of Justinian's hold over his people. Procopius makes only marginal references to religion. (See Averil Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century*, London, 1985.)

A weakness of Procopius' writings lies in the narrowness of his perspective. In his description of the Nika riots he cannot see the rioters as anything more than a rabble—the expected response of his class, perhaps, but not an adequate analysis of an event that incorporated some form of coherent political programme. Procopius' suspicions of Justinian were understandable but became so exaggerated that it is impossible to understand the motives of the emperor for putting in hand his great campaigns. This is part of a more general weakness, Procopius' failure to deal with causation in history. Years of triumph could be presented as part of God's divine favour for the empire or as the result of the qualities of the empire's leaders; years of catastrophe, such as 540 on the Persian border when Antioch was razed to the ground, left the historian overwhelmed and reduced to making banal statements

about Fate. Nevertheless Procopius remains a major historian. It can even be said that he is too successful a source, providing a picture of the reign that has been too easily absorbed by those who have read him. Despite the continuation of his history by one or two followers, he represented the last of the classical tradition. After Procopius history was written solely from a Christian perspective with the Bible providing the major source for the past and God's presence hovering over the unfolding of events.

The Church of St Sophia

The Nika riots had done extensive damage in Constantinople with many of the public buildings along the Mese, the ceremonial concourse of the city, destroyed. Among the ruins was the great church of St Sophia, the Holy Wisdom, traditionally one of Constantine's foundations and the church in which emperor and patriarch met on the major feast days of the church. Justinian was inspired to rebuild it in a form that would make it the most awe-inspiring church in Christendom, even if his apparent Christian commitment cannot be separated from his determination to exploit the chance to make a further impact as emperor. The rebuilt St Sophia still stands today, without doubt one of the great surviving buildings of antiquity (rivalled perhaps only by the Parthenon and Pantheon). Its centrepiece is a great dome rising from four massive piers joined by arches. In its final form the dome rises 55 metres above the ground (the first dome collapsed and a new one was dedicated in 563). The space over each pier between the arches is filled with spherical triangles on which the dome is supported. This left the space under the arches free on the east and west sides and two huge semi-domes were added to fill them. The eastern semi-dome was, in its turn, extended by semi-circular apses while the western one led to the vast entrance beyond which lay an open cloister. The north and south arches incorporated columned arcades at two levels. In antiquity the whole was covered with marble (some of which remains in the narthex) and mosaic.

There was no exact precedent for St Sophia. Some have seen Roman influences, the dome of the Pantheon combined with the hall of the great Basilica of Maxentius near the Forum (early fourth century), for instance. Others see precedents in Persia. The architects, Anthemius of Tralles and Isidore of Miletus, a physicist who had made a special study of domes and vaults, were clearly expected to provide something original and Justinian himself took the closest interest in their design. Their method of basing the dome was new and became the most significant contribution of the Byzantines to structural engineering.

It was the sense of space and mystery, as well as overwhelming opulence, which gripped contemporaries such as Procopius, who described the dome as if it was suspended from heaven. Another early enthusiast, Paul the Silentiary, reflected on the glowing inner light of the building—'the calm clear sky of joy lies open to all, driving away the dark-veiled mist of the soul. A Holy Light illuminates all.' Even now that much of the decoration is lost the building retains its capacity to amaze. 'Solomon, I have surpassed you,' Justinian is reputed to have said, with some justification,

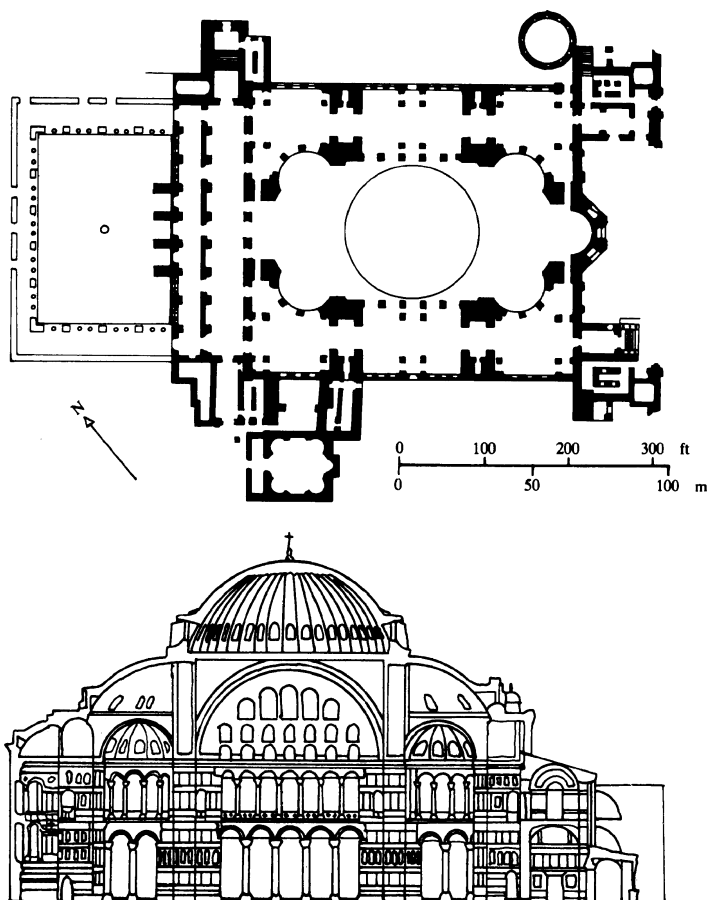


FIG. 13 Santa Sophia, Constantinople, built AD 532–7. The majesty and complexity of its design can be seen in this plan and section. Procopius described the great dome as giving the impression that it was suspended from heaven.

as he surveyed his achievement. Sinan, the greatest of the Ottoman architects, was haunted by its magnificence.

St Sophia was only one of a mass of churches built within Constantinople and across the empire by Justinian. It may not have been the most influential. The now destroyed Church of the Apostles in Constantinople, built as a cross with one dome in the centre and others on each arm of the cross, influenced the design of St Mark's in Venice. Recent excavations of the earlier (520s) St Polyeuktos show that this prefigured the magnificence of St Sophia. Among the grand creations of the period are the Church of the Hundred Gates on the island of Paros, and a great church built by Theodora in Ephesus. Justinian's other buildings varied between the use of the squared dome and the traditional basilica plan. The impressive monastery church, later known as St Catherine's, following a legend that the body of the celebrated

saint of Alexandria was taken there by angels after her martyrdom, set behind defensive walls at the foot of Mount Sinai, was a traditional basilica for instance, as were many smaller churches on the Syrian border. Not least of Justinian's achievements was the completion of the church of San Vitalis in Ravenna (which in itself echoes his earlier Sts Sergius and Bacchus still standing in Constantinople), where the famous mosaic portraits of himself and Theodora surrounded by their retinues are among the church's glories.

The Last Years of Justinian

In his *Buildings*, Procopius devotes more attention to Justinian's fortifications than to his churches (even though archaeology is suggesting that many of these had been initiated by Anastasius). It is a reminder of an empire under continuous military pressure. After 540 the successes in Africa and Italy were overshadowed by the devastating attack by the Persians on Antioch (from which the second city of the empire never fully recovered), the ravaging of Thrace by Huns, Bulgars, and Slavs, and the mounting problems in the campaigns in Italy. Added to this was the first of recurring outbreaks of bubonic plague. It spread from Egypt through Syria and Asia Minor, reaching Constantinople in 542. One theory is that an enormous volcanic eruption at Krakatoa resulted in a deterioration in climate—tree-ring growth was exceptionally low in many parts of the world between 530 and 550—and so famine which left a population especially vulnerable to infection. Although it is difficult to spot the impact of the disease in the archaeological record, it is estimated that between a third and a half of the population died in the worst affected cities. The effect on the morale of the empire and the manpower it could provide must have been profound but the survivors appear to have bargained to exploit their scarcity. One imperial decree complains of workers demanding two to three times the customary wage.

There is some evidence that the campaigns in Italy faltered under the impact of the plague so it is all the more remarkable that in the 550s the empire took the initiative once more and with some success. A fifty-year peace with Persia, which confirmed Lazica under Byzantine control, was signed in 561 and fighting was finally concluded in the empire's favour in Italy in the 550s. The most intractable border was the northern. A whole range of peoples, Bulgars, Avars, Slavs, pressed on the empire. Raids reached well into Greece and, on occasions, to the walls of Constantinople itself. This was the period when the cities of Greece went into permanent decline. Athens was raided by Slavs and Avars in 582 and the sites of ancient Sparta, Argos, and Corinth were abandoned while the inhabitants of Corinth sought refuge high up on Acrocorinth. The only effective way of dealing with such a range of peoples was to play one off against another, and from the 550s Byzantine diplomacy was employed to foster enmities between them. An Avar delegation was received in Constantinople in 557 for instance, and the Avars allied by treaty to the empire. They went on to subdue a mass of people north of the Danube borders, although they later returned to exact further subsidies from the empire.

Theodora had died in 548. Justinian was aged 66. Traditionally, the years that followed have been seen as ones in which he withdrew from public affairs and became preoccupied with religion. (The comparison has been made with Philip II of Spain toiling night after night in his office in the Escorial.) His outstanding ministers, John the Cappadocian and Tribonian, were both dead by 542, just at the time the plague struck. Certainly this was a period when Justinian became increasingly co-opted within religious ritual. The city became a backdrop to the colourful ceremonial that accompanied his every move around the city. Yet Justinian's diplomatic manoeuvres in the north of the 550s suggest a man still in control of policy-making and foreign affairs.

Certainly so far as religious affairs were concerned there was no withdrawal. Justinian was determined to resolve the continuing disputes over the nature of Christ. The search for unity was hampered by Monophysitism, still strong in the eastern provinces of the empire. As early as the 530s Justinian had been trying to find a way of bringing back the moderate Monophysites into the orthodox church. His best hope seemed to be to launch a new condemnation of 'Nestorianism' (of the variety preached by the Church of the East), in the hope that he could rally the Monophysites behind him. He picked out the so-called Three Chapters, texts written by three fifth-century bishops within which sympathy for Nestorianism might be detected. The bishops had, however, been specifically cleared of any heresy at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 and so any attempt to condemn them now would undermine the authority of that council.

This did not prevent Justinian from calling a new council to meet in Constantinople in 553 to revive the issue. The emperor browbeat the attending bishops into accepting his interpretations of the texts. The result of what Judith Herrin has called 'a hollow triumph of political intrigue and imperial intervention' was to deeply offend the western church, whose bishops believed that the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon should not be discarded at the whim of an emperor. A schism between the western (Catholic) and eastern (Orthodox) churches was one step nearer. The Monophysites failed to be reconciled and in fact proceeded with the development of their own hierarchy. A tragic casualty of the Council of 553 was the condemnation as a heretic of the greatest of the earliest Christian theologians, Origen, by those insensitive to his Platonism and rejection of hellfire. (See further the overview by Patrick Gray, 'The Legacy of Chalcedon: Christological Problems and their Significance', chapter 9 in Michael Maas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, Cambridge, 2005.)

The Emergence of the Byzantine Empire

Many scholars trace the emergence of the Byzantine empire to the moment when Constantine linked Christianity to the success of imperial Rome and gave his empire a new and enduring base in Constantinople. (Byzantine derives from Byzantium, the name of the Greek city on which Constantinople was built.) Others see

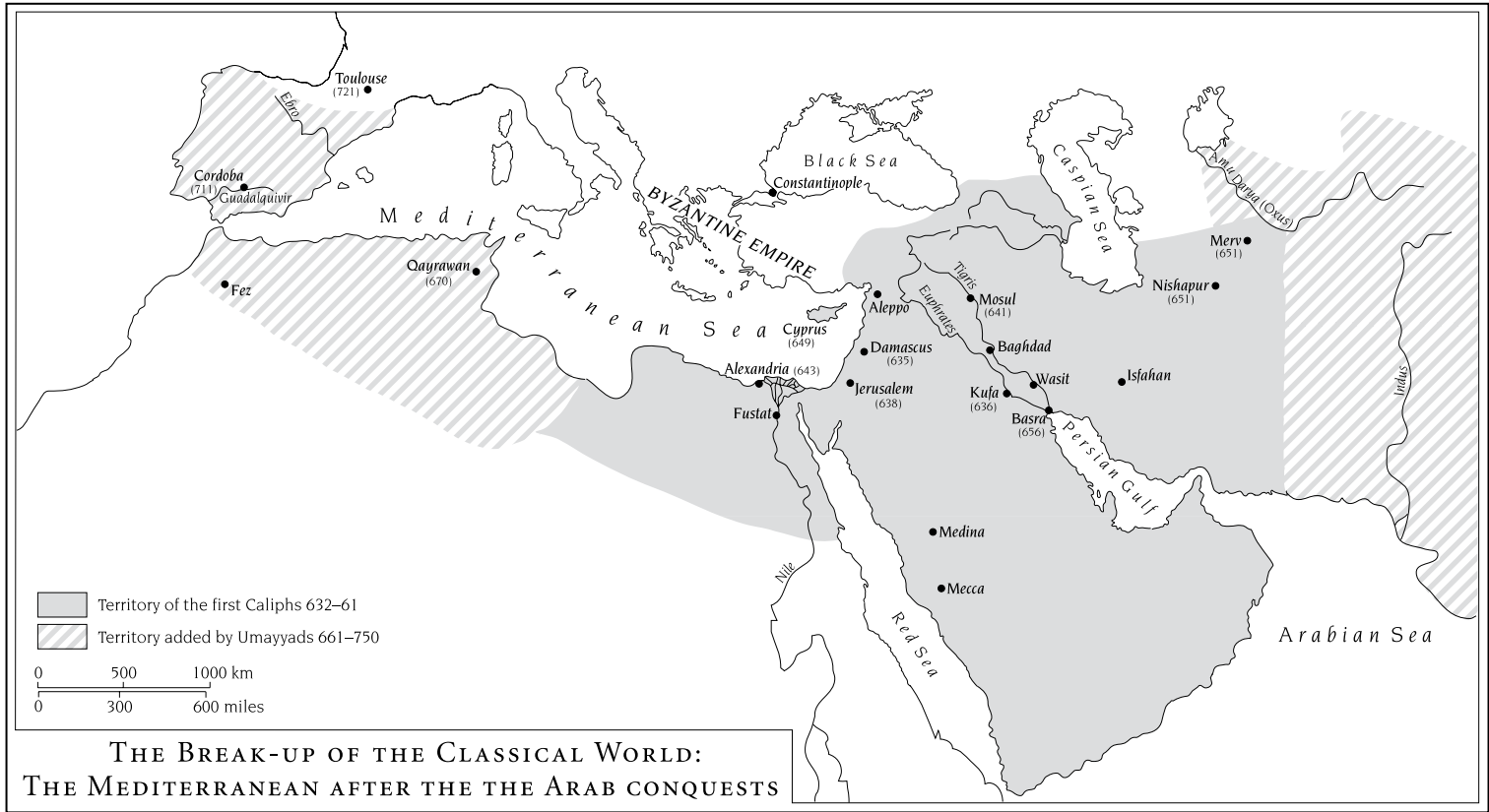
the reign of Justinian as the turning point. By the late sixth century the transition from the classical to the Byzantine world, one in which a predominantly Christian, Greek culture was precariously maintained by an autocratic state beset by enemies, had been completed. After Justinian's death Latin gradually became redundant. An important moment came in 629 when Heraclius officially titled himself *basileus* rather than the traditional *imperator*. The titles of courtiers were now in Greek. The leading military official is a *strategos*, the leading civilian a *krites*.

By now a more intensely Christian atmosphere pervaded the empire. In the cities resources now seem to be targeted almost exclusively at Christian buildings. Justiniana Prima, a city founded by Justinian at his birthplace in Dacia (now close to Skopje) in 535, boasted a cathedral, seven basilica churches, and only one modest bath house. Christian liturgies and the music that accompanied them become an important part of general culture. There is a new emphasis on the unknowability of God, especially in the works of the mystic known as pseudo-Dionysus, first thought to have been those of a follower of Paul but now dated to c. AD 500. There was no longer any place for individual speculation about the divine. 'The saved and hidden truth about the celestial intelligences should be concealed through the inexpressible and the sacred and be inaccessible to the common masses,' as pseudo-Dionysus put it.

Reason was therefore no longer held to be important in grasping 'the inexpressible mysteries' of the Christian faith. Justinian warned the people of Constantinople that the frequent earthquakes in the city were a sign of God's wrath and needed to be propitiated by more virtuous living. It was to be a thousand years before the possibility that earthquakes might have natural causes was revived. The icon, a picture of Christ, the Virgin Mary, or a saint, normally painted on wood, became increasingly popular at all levels of society. The most venerated were believed to be 'not made by human hands' and had the ability to effect miracles. When Constantinople was besieged in 626, the city's icons were paraded before the enemy and portraits of the Virgin Mary were carried round the walls. The city survived.

The horizons of the state also appear to have become narrower as communications and territories contracted. This was a time of increasing isolation for the empire. The attacks, from both north and east, were unrelenting. The early seventh century saw the crumbling of the Danube borders and the most successful Persian attack ever on the empire with both Jerusalem and Alexandria lost. Asia Minor was ravaged and even Constantinople was nearly captured. Under the usurping emperor Heraclius (610–41) a sensational recovery took place that brought the Sasanian empire close to collapse. It was celebrated not by the traditional triumph on the Roman model that Belisarius had enjoyed a century earlier but by the return of a fragment of the True Cross to the recovered Jerusalem. As Heraclius approached in his imperial finery, the city gate swung shut and it was only when he had humbly stripped to his underclothes that it miraculously sprung open. Even emperors must now submit to God.

Hardly had Heraclius' success been celebrated, however, than an onslaught of a totally unexpected nature came from the south. The deserts of Arabia had long



MAP 20

been home to wandering nomadic tribes, who shared a rich language spread among them by poets and storytellers, but who had never had the resources to create a settled state. It was their very statelessness that brought the possibility that they could unite if given a common purpose. This was provided by Muhammad, of the Arab tribe of Quraysh, who began preaching in his native town of Mecca on the coast of the Red Sea, 1,600 kilometres south of the Byzantine frontiers, in about 610. Muhammad delivered to the Arab people the summation of God's message to mankind, in the Koran, that they must surrender to the will of God (this 'surrender' provides the word Islam) and maintain the message through *jihad*.

Jihad is often translated as 'holy war' but its connotations are as much of maintaining one's identity or message as of using violence. In 622 Muhammad moved northwards with his supporters to the oasis of Medina in a *hijra*, an emigration of a people in search of new land to settle. The *hijra* marked the starting year of a Muslim calendar and transformed Muhammad and his followers into a nation in arms. They created their own history (in much the same way Christians had by appropriating the Hebrew scriptures) by presenting themselves as the true children of Abraham. To Christians and Jews, both of whom had their own profound reverence for Abraham, they were difficult to place. Heraclius, faced with an Arab delegation, is reported to have remarked that 'This people is like an evening, between daylight and nightfall, neither sun-lit nor dark... so this people is neither illumined by the light of Christ nor is it plunged into the darkness of idolatry.'

After the death of Muhammad in 632, Islam exploded northwards in a series of lightning military campaigns under his successors Abu Bakr (632–4) and 'Umar (634–44). Nomadic peoples are used to warfare and moving fast but often fall back when challenged. Islam was different in giving the Arab peoples a cohesive sense of community (*umma*) that they were able to maintain after their conquests. Nevertheless the collapse of vast tracts of the Byzantine empire was startling. The Byzantine rulers had had no time to successfully restore order to their southern provinces after the Persian invasions and their largely Monophysite population remained resentful over the attempted imposition of religious orthodoxy from Constantinople. The Jews, increasingly persecuted by the Christian state, had no reason for loyalty and may even have welcomed the invaders.

The overrunning of the southern provinces was swift. The defeat of the Byzantine army at the Yarmuk river in 636 left Syria and Palestine open to Islamic conquest. The Sasanians were crushed shortly afterwards. In 642 Alexandria capitulated to Islam and over the next century the Arabs spread inexorably along the coast of north Africa (eliminating Byzantine rule there) and then across the Straits of Gibraltar. Only the victory of Charles Martel at Poitiers in 733 finally halted an advance that had also destroyed Visigothic Spain. The Byzantine empire, meanwhile, had lost 75 per cent of its revenue and was facing challenges of a very different sort; but we must end there.

The Archaeological Museum in Naples has outstanding treasures, many of which are now brightly displayed in renovated galleries. On the ground floor pride of place is given to the Farnese sculptures. This extraordinary collection originated in Rome in the 1540s as part of an aggressive acquisitions policy by Alessandro Farnese, later pope Paul III. Many were found among the ruins of the Baths of Caracalla, others dug up at other sites in the city, and still others brought in from other aristocratic collections to make up over 300 original statues in all. They include the *Farnese Bull*, the largest single sculpture known from antiquity, the only copy known of the fifth-century statue of the 'liberators' Harmodius and Aristogeiton from Athens (see earlier, p. 181), the *Farnese Hercules*, a particularly erotic Venus, and many busts of emperors.

What makes the collection unique is that unlike most others accumulated in that period it was never broken up. It had stood in the massive Farnese palace in Rome (now the French embassy) until the eighteenth century but Elisabetta Farnese, the last of the Farnese to inherit it, in 1731, was the queen of Philip IV of Spain and it was her son Charles, the Bourbon ruler of the Kingdom of the two Sicilies, who transferred it to his capital, Naples. Many of the statues are second-century AD marble copies of bronzes from the classical period of Greece, some five or six hundred years before, so they show how powerfully this period still resonated with educated Romans. Yet in the sixteenth century they aroused equal enthusiasm.

This enthusiasm had begun in 1506 when the *Laocoon*, a statue of the Trojan Laocoon and his two sons, who had warned of the threat posed by the Trojan Horse but who had been strangled by two snakes which came across the sea to entangle them, was uncovered on the Esquiline Hill in Rome. Michelangelo was on hand to watch the statue being revealed and the *Laocoon* was immediately hailed as one of the supreme achievements of classical art, not least because it had the honour of being specifically mentioned by Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History*. It was immediately snapped up by pope Julius II for the Vatican and is seen as one of the founding sculptures of the Museums there. (It is usually dated to the late first century BC and is probably a copy of an earlier sculpture.)

Just as the *Laocoon* was being uncovered on the Esquiline Hill, on the Janiculum, another of Rome's seven hills, the architect Donato Bramante was perfecting one of the most exquisite classical buildings of the Renaissance. Commissioned by Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain to stand on the supposed site of St Peter's martyrdom,

the Tempietto is a sheer delight. Inspired by nearby Roman buildings such as the theatre of Marcellus and the graceful circular temple of Hercules, in the Forum Boarium by the river, its columns are surmounted by an entablature and then a dome. Small though it is, it was instantly recognized as a masterpiece. Seventy years later the architect Andrea Palladio accepted it as equal to the buildings of the ancients and its design, a columned surround surmounted by a dome, was echoed through the western world, from St Paul's Cathedral in London to the Capitol building in Washington.

So the Farnese collection has to be seen as the creation of an age where scholars were becoming enthused with the aura of classical antiquity to the extent of trying to reproduce it in new forms and clawing ancient ruins for buried treasures. There were other important moments to come. Moving up the great staircase of the Archaeological Museum, one comes to another fabulous collection, from the Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum. The villa takes its name from the library of charred papyrus rolls, some 1,800 of them, that were found in 1752 packed in crates that had been covered with the lava from the eruption of Vesuvius of AD 79. No other library from antiquity survives and the limited decipherment of the charred scrolls shows that at least part of this one was dedicated to philosophy, notably Epicureanism. Several works are by the Epicurean philosopher Philodemus of Gadara who came to Rome in about 80 BC. The full exploration of the library will certainly lead to new understandings of ancient texts and the way they were perceived and cherished by the Roman elite. (The Philodemus Project exists to decipher and publish the texts.)

The villa could only be approached through shafts and underground tunnels but it was soon shown to be a luxurious establishment, now known to have belonged to Julius Caesar's father-in-law, Lucius Calpurnius Piso. Even though only a small part has yet been excavated, its plan is well known from the meticulous plotting of the eighteenth-century discoverers (accurate enough to allow the villa to be re-created in California to house the Paul Getty collection of antiquities). Its terraces and porticos spread along the coastline of the Bay of Naples and were graced with wonderful statuary, much of it in bronze. Again the taste of the first-century BC owner was for the earlier classical Greek and there are busts of philosophers and statesmen from Athens, alongside satyrs and dancing girls from the less formal areas of the villa.

By this time Rome and Florence were on the Grand Tour made by young English aristocrats eager to finish off their education in suitable style through exploring the past glories of Italy. The collection at Naples was jealously guarded by the Bourbon kings who were determined, in the Renaissance tradition of treasure hunting, to keep the finds of Pompeii and Herculaneum for themselves. (This does mean that most finds from the excavations remain to be seen on site or in the Archaeological Museum.) But the discoveries of Herculaneum and Pompeii and the knowledge that large areas of cities and villas buried in 79 were still to be explored (as they still are) aroused a new passion for the Roman world. The excitement was intensified by Johann Winckelmann's reports on the excavations that can be seen as among the first attempts to bring a scientific approach to archaeology, although it was over a hundred years before his plea bore fruit. (For Winckelmann, see Interlude 3, and below.)

So the history of the reception of the classical world by later generations is very rich even if it is extremely difficult to unravel all the different influences and reactions that jostle with each other over the centuries. Despite the collapse of the western empire in the fifth century it had always been impossible to escape the Roman past. Roman roads continued to be used, the shells of cities still stood. Rome only slowly fell into ruin, and many of its great buildings, the Pantheon and the Colosseum, stood largely intact, as they still do today. The new rulers of western Europe adapted Roman law to their purposes and some modelled themselves on what they considered to be Roman imperial behaviour. The celebrated nineteenth-century French historian Ernest Renan (1823–92) went so far as to suggest that Italy never experienced the Middle Ages at all. There was simply the fall of the Roman empire and the rebirth of classical civilization in exactly the same places where it had fallen into decay.

This is much too sweeping. The vitality of the Roman economy had gone and living standards were drastically lower in an age where, so far as documentary evidence is concerned, much is still ‘dark’. It was the Church that most benefited from the collapse of the empire. (Having taken Peter Brown’s caveat that we should not use the capital ‘C’ for the varied Christian communities of late antiquity (see earlier, p. 602), ‘Church’ now does seem justified.) Bishops and monasteries gradually extended their wealth and influence so that by the ninth century the Church owned a third of all the land in Europe. The first major secular ruler of the post-Roman world, Charlemagne, crowned Holy Roman emperor by the pope in 800, did, however, take on many of the trappings of a Roman emperor. Charlemagne saw himself as a patron of learning and selected ancient texts were copied and preserved. Understandably when parchment was so expensive in terms of the number of animals that had to be killed to provide it, the monks chose to concentrate on Christian works and these make up the overwhelming majority of texts listed in early monastery catalogues. It is to Charlemagne, rather than the Church, that the survival of classical texts is credited. (See Rosamond McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity*, Cambridge and New York, 2008, especially chapter 5 ‘*Correctio*, knowledge and power’.)

The revival of European trade centred on the city-states of northern Italy, at first those that were on the coast, Venice, Pisa, and Genoa, and then those further inland such as Florence (first prominent only from 1200). In order to flourish they had to forge an identity that would allow them to confront the power of the Church and the ambitions of the successors of Charlemagne as Holy Roman emperors. The emperors wished to control northern Italy for themselves. Very gradually there was an awareness that treatises of Aristotle, notably his *Politics*, and Cicero’s works on republican government gave their citizens models from the past that spoke to their needs. For the new urban middle classes, especially the lawyers, Roman law provided an ideal. The rediscovery of Justinian’s Law Codes in the single surviving copy in 1070 was an important turning point in that they provided guidelines for the preservation of property and the rights of individuals. The *Defensor Pacis*, ‘Defender of the Peace’ (1324), by Marsilius of Padua set out a sophisticated defence of the sovereignty of the city-state against the pretensions of Church and emperor.

It drew heavily on the *Politics* of Aristotle. By the 1330s, according to the chronicler Villani, some 500 to 600 boys in Florence were studying a curriculum of Latin. Here the notaries, who carried out the basic legal work of the city, including teaching students, came into their own. They used Roman sources on history, politics, law, rhetoric, and moral philosophy with the aim of producing upright citizens who knew the basics of Roman law, could argue well, and who were, following their study of Cicero, at home with the politics of republicanism.

Yet, while these texts may have had a functional purpose, there was also a revived admiration for the ancient world in itself. Already in his the *Divine Comedy* (published by 1317), Dante Alighieri, the foremost poet of the Middle Ages, had chosen Virgil as his mentor for his exploration of the underworld. The most influential guide was Petrarch (1304–74). Petrarch was originally from Arezzo in Tuscany but became an inveterate wanderer around monastic libraries and the ruins of cities, especially those of Rome. Among his greatest discoveries were the letters of Cicero to Atticus (see earlier, p. 423). Cicero's prose soon became the model for the correct use of Latin. More than this, Petrarch proclaimed that the Roman world was the home of moral truths that were worthy forerunners of Christianity. Here was the birth of European Humanism. Petrarch, and his scholarly successors in the fifteenth century, argued that in almost every field, including statecraft, the waging of war, the creation of art, and the search for the 'good life', the classical world had provided exemplars to follow. By the end of the fifteenth century, no one in Italy could call themselves educated unless they had steeped themselves in the major Roman authors and could write Latin in a style of which Cicero would have approved. Remarkably Renaissance Humanism was able to coexist with Christianity, with ancient values such as *pietas* being linked to their Christian equivalents. Some great figures of the Roman world, the emperor Trajan, for instance, were even given the accolade of honorary Christians, while there were popes, notably Pius II (pope 1458–64), who were themselves enthusiasts for classical learning.

It was not until 1397 that Colluccio Salutati, the chancellor of Florence and another sophisticated Humanist, expanded the world of classical scholarship by asking the Greek scholar Manuel Chysoloras to come to Florence to teach Greek. Knowledge of Greek had vanished in western Europe by 700 but many Greek texts had filtered through to the west in translations from the Arabic. After their sweep of conquests, the Arabs had ruled as an elite for whom conversion was not an immediate priority. They had used Greek administrators, and inscriptions in Greek had persisted long after the conquest. Many educated Arabs enthused over the surviving Greek texts. In the words of the ninth-century scholar Abu al-Hasan Tabith the 'heathens' (i.e. the Greeks) had contributed much. 'Who made the world to be inhabited and flooded it with cities except the good men and kings of heathenism? Who has constructed harbours and conserved the rivers? Who has made manifest the hidden sciences... and it is they who have also made to arise the medicine for bodies. And they have filled the world with the correctness of modes of life and with the wisdom which is the head of excellence.' Arab philosophy included science and medicine built on Greek texts in a way that was not possible in the Christian world.

The Arabs had rediscovered Aristotle's surviving works in the ninth century and the extraordinary breadth and coherence of his ideas proved compelling. In the eleventh century the brilliant philosopher Ibn Sina (Avicenna, as he became known to the Latin west) had created an influential synthesis of Aristotle's ideas and this was added to by another major commentator, Ibn Rushd (in Latin Averroes, 1126–98). Aristotle was treated almost as if he were divine. Averroes credited him with the foundation of three major academic disciplines, logic, natural philosophy (the study of the natural world), and metaphysics, the study of the fundamental questions of existence. Aristotle's influence was partly due to his being taken up by these intellectuals but, as the historian of science David Lindberg notes, also 'from the extraordinary explanatory power of Aristotle's philosophical and scientific system'. He was so obviously superior to anything else on offer and the sophisticated Arabs grasped this.

Christian philosophy had long absorbed Platonism but the *Timaeus* was the only one of Plato's works known in the west. (They were only studied and translated from the originals in the later fifteenth century when, in Florence, Cosimo de' Medici sponsored translations by Marsilio Ficino.) So, when Aristotle's works were rediscovered by Latin scholars in the thirteenth century, he had no contenders and he quickly became known as 'The Philosopher'. Yet his works were much more problematic to the Christian theologians than those of Plato. Aristotle's emphasis on empirical observation of the material world contrasted with the spiritual approach to life supported by the Church. In specific areas, such as the creation of the universe, the nature of the soul, and the supremacy of reason over faith, Aristotle confronted Christian orthodoxy head on. In the university of Paris where his works were first appreciated, the church authorities worked hard to ban him.

It took a brilliant Dominican, Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), to reconcile Aristotle with Catholic theology and establish him as the most respected source of knowledge, the arbiter of correct thinking about the natural world. While, by the sixteenth century, criticisms of Aristotle had appeared, he remained the authority for many areas of learning well into the seventeenth century. The Aristotle scholar Jonathan Barnes has even suggested that 'an account of Aristotle's intellectual after-life would be little less than a history of European thought'. In biology he remained influential as late as the nineteenth century.

By the sixteenth century classical Humanism had spread through the educated classes of Europe, notably through such fine scholars as the Dutch Erasmus (1466–1536), who championed new approaches to learning and understanding the classics, both Greek and Latin. (It is extraordinary to realize that no one in western Europe had read Paul's Letters in the original Greek until now—their vigour had been concealed by the decorous Latin of Jerome and their rough urgency was an immense shock.) It brought with it a thoughtful but critical approach to living. An important breakthrough came with the realization that the classical authors had not always got it right. So Copernicus, while admiring the achievements of Ptolemy (see p. 550), grasped that it was the sun, not the earth, that was the centre of the solar system and so revolutionized astronomy. Leonardo da Vinci pioneered the

accurate observation of human anatomy and soon followers such as Vesalius (*On the Fabric of the Human Body* of 1543) were showing that the Greek authorities such as Galen had often given inaccurate descriptions of the human body that had been accepted uncritically by physicians. Natural history took a great leap forward when it was realized that Pliny's *Natural History* was full of misconceptions and that the 'authoritative' works of Theophrastus and Dioscorides on plants (see earlier, p. 291) could be corrected by the collection and examination of new samples. It was not necessarily that the scholars of the sixteenth century were more brilliant than their forebears. With the rediscovery of the Sceptics (see earlier, p. 353) in the late sixteenth century, they were using tools from the ancient philosophy to challenge conventional ways of thinking whether the sources for these were ancient authorities or not. The approach of the philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650) was well within the tradition of the Sceptics as he dug down to find a basis for knowing anything at all.

By the end of the century there was a more mature and settled approach to the study of the ancient world. The *Essais* of Montaigne (1580) were full of classical allusions and showed how well an educated mind could digest and use the ancient authors creatively. He was an enthusiast for Lucretius. Shakespeare too drew freely on classical models and events from Roman history (the plays *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*). By Shakespeare's time, English had absorbed contributions from Latin and Greek so completely that 50 per cent of everyday English words have a Greek or Latin origin, expressed, of course, in a sequence of symbols (the alphabet) which, from its origins in the Near East, reached its final form in the Latin world. The debt of the Romance languages to Latin is even greater.

The sixteenth century was the age of the great collectors, although England did not know much of classical art until the 'collector earl' of Arundel brought back his own purchases from the Mediterranean in the early 1600s. (The collection was soon broken up but the core of his Greek and Roman statuary remains in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford.) On his forays to the Mediterranean Arundel took with him a young architect by the name of Inigo Jones and they soon came across the works of an earlier architectural genius, Andrea Palladio (1508–80). Palladio had begun life as a stonecutter in Padua but his talents had been spotted by Gian Giorgio Trissino, a Humanist scholar from nearby Vicenza, who initiated him into ancient Roman architecture. Soon Palladio was applying his fertile and innovative mind to the buildings around him, first the decaying town hall in Vicenza (now the Basilica Palladiana) which he encased in a classical shell, and then a series of villas and palaces and later, in Venice, two major churches. His inspiration came from the Roman architect Vitruvius (c.80 to 15 BC) whose *De Architectura*, the only surviving treatise on architecture from the ancient world, had been championed a hundred years before by the Florentine Humanist Leon Battista Alberti. Palladio's own reworking of the ideals of fine building, his *I quattro libri dell'architettura*, was enormously influential in spreading classical styles through Europe. Inigo Jones, who had brought back a large cache of Palladio's drawings, was one of the pioneers of Palladianism in England.

By the eighteenth century classicism was supreme as an architectural form. In Britain the *literati* termed themselves the 'Augustans' as they claimed that new styles of literature echoed those that had characterized the age of Augustus. The poet Horace was especially suited to the lives of the English aristocracy with their mix of leisure and politics. Some went further. Haunted by the collapse of the Roman empire as he surveyed the ruins of ancient Rome, Edward Gibbon conceived his *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (published in six volumes, 1776–89). Gibbon showed how a mastery of the original sources could be enlivened in a narrative that saw Christianity as the corrupter of earlier Roman ideals. It was the supreme achievement of Enlightenment history. (Even as late as the 1960s, I was advised to read Gibbon to improve my style!)

Although the Parthenon had been visited as early as the fourteenth century, Greece, now ruled by the Ottoman empire, was virtually inaccessible. In the eighteenth century the first travellers began to record what they had found there. For the British reader, James 'Athenian' Stuart and Nicholas Revett's well-illustrated *Antiquities of Athens* (1762) initiated a craze for Greek architecture. (Edinburgh was a noted beneficiary of the enthusiasm, so much so that it became known as 'the Athens of the North'.) This was just at the same time that Johann Winckelmann was idealizing the Greek classical period as a pinnacle in the history of art (see earlier, p. 245) although in his case the only models he had were usually Roman copies of Greek originals. In Italy, there was the first appreciation of the Etruscans. At a time when knowledge of classical Greece was still limited, the enormous numbers of fine Greek vases coming from Etruscan tombs were assumed to have been made by the Etruscans themselves. The English potter Josiah Wedgwood was so carried away with the excitement of the finds that he named the factory that reproduced them 'Etruria'. A more measured approach to the study of Etruscan civilization came from Mario Guarnacci of the ancient Etruscan site of Volterra whose large collection of Etruscan and other antiquities was opened in 1761 in Volterra as one of the earliest public museums in Europe.

Thanks to the influence of Winckelmann, this was the age of neo-classicism, a revival of a fascination with Greek and Roman styles. The supreme exponent of the new mood was Antonio Canova (1757–1822), the son of a Venetian stonecutter who became engrossed by both sculpture and the classical world. He soon found patrons who supported his move to Rome, the cultural capital of revived classicism, in 1780. His memorials to the popes Clement XIII and Clement XIV earned him his reputation and allowed him to branch out into classical themes. His best works combined a wonderful simplicity with tenderness as in *Psyche Revived by Cupid's Kiss* (1786), a work inspired by the story of Psyche and Cupid in Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, and now in the Louvre, Paris.

Yet while neo-classicist styles were being integrated into every form of art, there were political challenges. The fledgling United States needed a constitution after it had broken free from the British monarchy. The leading figures of the American Revolution were, like their contemporaries in Europe, steeped in classical learning (Thomas Jefferson was perhaps the most accomplished) and it was

natural that they should turn to the Roman republic for inspiration. Cicero once again took the stage as the most urbane commentator on political matters from the period. It was the combination of republican ethical ideals, notably the service of the state being seen as the acme of civic virtue, that attracted but there was also the model of a constitution that had checks and balances, a model that both Aristotle and Cicero had endorsed. So President, Congress, and Supreme Court were each given their own powers and it seemed only right to call the senior house of the House of Representatives the Senate. Washington emerged as essentially a 'classical' city.

Shortly after the Constitution had been promulgated another monarchy collapsed. The French had been among the most sophisticated of the classical scholars and there was no shortage of models to draw on as they came to terms with the overthrow and execution of king Louis XVI in 1793. The Altar of Liberty that replaced the altars of the church was graced by a statue of the Brutus who had killed the last king of Rome. In Jacques-Louis David's drawing *The Triumph of the French People*, 'the people' are personified by a nude warrior aloft on a ponderous triumphal chariot that rolls over the insignia of the clergy. A fallen king lies further ahead on the route. Robespierre, who had had a traditional classical education, spoke in terms of a Platonic republic in which 'liberty' would be imposed by an elite. When a new model of education was searched for, that of Sparta seemed to contain the right mixture of intense patriotic pride with rigorous training. Throughout the festivals of the nascent republican state, classical allusions predominated. (Simon Schama's *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*, London and New York, 1989, is especially good on this aspect.)

Within ten years, however, the versatility of the classical tradition as an inspiration had become apparent. Napoleon Bonaparte idealized himself as a world conqueror on the model of Julius Caesar and his first official political position was as First Consul of France. Where Caesar had hesitated about endorsing autocracy, Napoleon had no such inhibitions. The Consul soon becomes transformed into Emperor, crowned in a sumptuous ceremony that echoed both classical and medieval precedents in 1804.

Napoleon revelled in Paris as 'the new Rome'. A triumphal arch, the Arc du Carrousel, was topped by the last surviving classical *quadriga*, the four horses of St Mark's that Napoleon had looted from Venice. Even the sewers of Paris were modelled on the Cloaca Maxima that ran beneath the Forum. Canova was summoned to Paris to re-create Napoleon as nude classical hero, although in a statue that aroused only ridicule when it was completed. (It can now be found in the entrance hall of Apsley House in London, where it was taken by the Duke of Wellington after Napoleon's defeat.)

One major intellectual achievement did survive from Napoleon's megalomania and this was the fruits of the exploration of ancient Egypt that he commissioned when he was campaigning there in 1798. As a child of the Enlightenment, Napoleon had assembled a team of 167 experts, including historians, artists, botanists, and engineers, and he set them to work surveying and plotting what remained. A first

intimation of what was to come appeared in *Voyage in Lower and Upper Egypt* by the artist and diplomat Dominique-Vivant Denon in 1802. It enthralled its readers and set off a mania for all things Egyptian that soon could be seen in the French furniture of the period. The ground was laid for the official account of the expedition, *La Description de l'Égypte*, that was published between 1809 and 1828. As the final volumes appeared there was another major breakthrough, the decipherment of hieroglyphics by Jean-François Champollion. Champollion had used the Rosetta stone with its three texts as a source (so had others but it took Champollion's erudite command of languages to succeed). After his own expedition to Egypt in 1828 Champollion had gathered enough new inscriptions to be able to publish the first Egyptian grammar.

The enthusiasm for all things Egyptian led to extensive looting of the ancient sites. Eventually another Frenchman, Auguste Marriette, who had himself been involved in smuggling Egyptian antiquities to Paris, was appointed Director of Ancient Monuments in Egypt in 1858. He soon transformed himself from poacher to gamekeeper, dealing ruthlessly with looters and assembling treasures for the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities in Cairo that he had founded. The new mood of study of Egypt for its own sake, rather than for what could be seized for European museums, was embodied in the work of the English archaeologist Flinders Petrie (1853–1942). Petrie was a brilliant and meticulous excavator. He recognized the importance of describing everything that was found, however humble, and establishing a sequence of layers and styles so any new find could be classified within it. The contrast of his painstaking accumulation of pottery with the most dramatic find of all, the tomb of the boy pharaoh Tutankhamun in the Valley of the Kings by Howard Carter in November 1922, was immense. 'Everywhere the glitter of gold', Carter announced as he caught his first glimpse of its treasures and 'Tutmania' swept the world.

While ancient Egypt was capturing the imagination of many, the Prussians had set up their own pedestal for the Greeks. The shock of defeat by Napoleon had led to an urge to re-create the nation on new enduring principles. 'In the Greeks alone we find the ideal of what we should like to be and produce', enthused the scholar Wilhelm von Humboldt, the Education Minister. His views were supported by another scholar, Friedrich August Wolf (1759–1824). For Wolf the Greeks were the embodiment 'of true humanity'. However, he insisted that studying the Greeks should be an intense experience. Students had not only to immerse themselves in the texts but in every other aspect of Greek society so that they could understand the content and detail of what they had read. There was a moral purpose to all this. The Greeks would teach self-discipline, idealism, and nobility of character. German scholarship soon led Europe. It is telling that in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, the introverted scholar Casaubon spends years on his great work of classical mythology but never realizes that the Germans have progressed far beyond him. This austere Germanic approach to the Greeks gradually came to overlay the romantic philhellenism (love of ancient Greece) which had greeted the arrival of the Parthenon marbles, bought by the British government in 1816 and which had caught

the imagination of Lord Byron and his supporters when the Greeks declared independence from the Ottoman empire in 1821.

There were important scholars in England too, George Grote's *History of Greece* (twelve volumes, 1846–56) was one of the most influential books of the age, but the pace of academic life at Oxford and Cambridge was more relaxed than it was in Berlin. Attention remained focused on the texts. It was not until 1890 that one could study archaeology at Oxford and then only as an option. Those with pure minds were not expected to lower themselves far enough to be able to take up a spade (or later, in more scientific times, a trowel) even if nineteenth-century excavations usually, in fact, involved the management of large groups of native workmen. Meanwhile upper-class Englishmen could be expected to take Rome as a model for their own control of empire. Athenian democracy presented more of a challenge but Plato's *Republic*, a key text in the university curriculum, could be relied on to show its dangers. Grote simply ignored the reality of slavery and presented the Athenian Assembly as a forerunner of the British House of Commons (of which he had been a member).

The pervasiveness of the classical experience spread everywhere. By the end of the century English artists such as Lawrence Alma-Tadema were breathing sensuality into what had been cold marble nudes. It was quite respectable to gaze on voluptuous female bodies if they were presented in the context of long dead civilizations. The Roman bath house provided a wonderful setting for languor in a state of undress. In contrast, Baron Pierre de Coubertin looked back to a more energetic classical past when he refounded the Olympic Games in 1896. Taking place every four years as their ancient equivalent had done, they have perhaps proved the most successful legacy of all.

Then came the First World War. The classically educated combatants began by identifying themselves with Homeric heroes, but there had been no mud and machine guns in Troy and the slaughter took place on a different scale. Most 'heroes' died an anonymous death and the shock to all forms of authority, including education in the hallowed classics, was profound. In his influential *The Decline of the West*, published (in German) in July 1918, just before the war ended, the historian Oswald Spengler challenged the whole idea that world history should be centred on the achievements of the ancient Greeks. He questioned the greatness of Socrates, Thucydides, and even Plato.

The Roman empire was, however, soon to find new champions. The Fascist leader Benito Mussolini, coming to power in Italy in 1922, was determined to re-create an empire based on a revived Italian manliness. He clawed his way through the medieval layers of the history of Rome to find the authentic monuments of empire that still lay beneath and exposed them to view along the grand Via dei Fori Imperiali. There was much that was harmless, even farcical, in the uniforms and insignia of the new 'Roman' shocktroops, but Mussolini's subjects refused to be fitted into heroic stereotypes. When he actually tried to re-create a territorial Roman empire through the brutal conquest of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in 1936, the crudity of his ambitions was revealed. (There is an excellent study of Roman attitudes to the past,

including the Roman empire, in Richard Bosworth's *Rome: The Whispering City*, New Haven and London, 2011. See also Catharine Edwards (ed.), *Roman Presences: Receptions of Rome in European Culture, 1789–1945*, Cambridge and New York, 1999.)

The ancient world also resonated within Hitler's Germany. In his *Germania*, which has survived only in a single copy, the Roman historian Tacitus had written 'that the peoples of Germany had never contaminated themselves by intermarriage with foreigners but remain of pure blood, distinct and unlike any other nation'. This was music to the Nazis' ears and the text was given honorary status, with a foreword by Heinrich Himmler, the leader of the Nazi SS, in an edition published in 1943. The propaganda films of Leni Riefenstahl evoked the nude heroism and perfect bodies of the Greeks. Hitler himself warmed to the combination of military prowess and patriotic virtue of the Spartans. As in 1918, the defeat of the fascist dictators simply made all the monumental buildings and serried ranks of marching men redundant as ideals.

Since the end of the Second World War there have been new and shifting enthusiasms for the ancient world. The study of Greek, and, to a large but lesser extent, Latin, has dropped dramatically, but the interest in the past has grown through mass travel, novels, and cinema. Often the ancient world is presented in an as idealized form today as it ever was, especially as the demand for audience attention has preoccupied the film-makers. (There is a good summary in the entry on 'Cinema' in Anthony Grafton et al. (eds.), *The Classical Tradition*, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 2010.) The great civilizations of the ancient Mediterranean continue to challenge our imaginations at many different levels. Yet, alongside this, sophisticated scholarship, especially in the application of science to the varied remains of the Mediterranean world, have added a more precise understanding of these cultures. Imagination and scholarship are perhaps uneasy bedfellows but the tension between them is part of the tradition of 'reception' and will continue to be so.

There remain many challenges ahead. One is the simple problem of maintaining what has been excavated. The collapse of the House of the Gladiators in Pompeii in November 2010 was a symbolic warning of the deterioration of a site where no serious maintenance appears to have been carried out for half a century. I was in Pompeii myself a month before writing this and was frustrated by the number of houses that I had wanted to see that are now closed off. Meanwhile in Rome the uncovering of the opulent mausoleum of Marcus Nonius Macrinus, a successful general and confidant of the emperor of Marcus Aurelius (and a good example of how Hollywood transformed a historical character into something different in the film *Gladiator*), was one of the most important discoveries of recent years. It appears to be only one of a rich set of tombs on the ancient Via Flaminia leading north out of Rome and was beautifully preserved as a result of the silt from the Tiber. Now it looks as if it will have to be covered up again. Between 2011 and 2012, the maintenance budget for Italy's ruins has been slashed by 20 per cent and over 40 per cent of Italy's archaeological sites are now closed to the public for lack of paid staff.

At least there is the will, if not the money, to preserve in a country where there are enthusiastic heritage groups such as Italia Nostra and an educated awareness of the importance of the past. In many other parts of the world, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria at the time of writing, the heritage is acutely vulnerable as a result of the breakdown of order. Sites are neglected, museums looted, sites dug over for treasures, on occasion there is deliberate destruction for religious reasons. The high prices antiquities command on the world market mean that there are always incentives to steal and smuggle.

The great museums of Europe and the United States have benefited from their earlier access to the sites of the classical Mediterranean and the Ancient Near East. Their acquisitions were made easier in the nineteenth century by imperial arrogance, the weakness of the Ottoman empire, and the immense buying power of wealthy individuals. Many of their treasures have lost their original context and it would be impossible to create any systematic way of restoring them. So there are good reasons for maintaining a conservative approach to any demands for restoration so long as the museums themselves continue to conserve, display, and explain their collections.

Yet I do feel that the marbles of the Parthenon frieze are an exception. I have known them *in situ* in the Duveen Gallery for some fifty years and often look in on them when I am in the British Museum. It is hard to imagine them not there. So what is the case for restoration to Athens? Part of it is personal, a growing appreciation over the years of the sophistication and value of ancient Greek culture. In ancient Greece are to be found the chromosomes of western intellectual life as much in drama as in philosophy and aesthetics. These achievements are symbolized by the Parthenon, the quality of its sculptures and the extraordinarily advanced concepts behind its construction. I feel a quiet excitement at any prospect that the frieze be returned to take its place in the new Acropolis Museum in Athens.

A more pragmatic reason is that everything should be done to maintain the Parthenon as a whole, not in the mutilated state it is in now with the marbles in London. The world's cultural heritage would be enormously enhanced if these fragments were brought back together. There could be compensations. Without the marbles there would be a wonderful new exhibition space in the British Museum and one might hope that the Greek government would be generous in helping fill the Gallery with a series of stunning exhibitions that would provide London audiences with a greater understanding of the ancient Greek world. This hope seems to provide a fitting point with which to conclude.

WHAT TO READ NEXT

The most important development of the past ten years has been the rise of survey volumes of essays. They offer the opportunity to read succinct summaries of important themes often by leading authorities in the field. The best have editors who are shrewd in their choice of contributors, firm in the maintenance of standards, and generous in achieving a fully comprehensive coverage of the chosen theme. The problem is that these volumes tend to be expensive even in paperback and one often has to search through several to find the very best essays on a particular topic. These companions and other academic studies of the ancient world are usually reviewed online by the Bryn Mawr Classical Review, reviews that are fully accessible. These online reviews tend to be penetrating and aimed at the specialist but will pinpoint the most helpful volumes and individual essays.

There are four series that stand out. *The Cambridge History Ancient History* has been the traditional leader and the second edition was completed in fourteen volumes by 2006, with accompanying volumes of plates still appearing. It deals with areas chronologically but represents a wealth of scholarship on all aspects of the ancient world. Again from Cambridge are the Companion Series. These deal with political themes, from the Roman Republic to individual Roman statesmen and emperors, Pericles, Augustus, Constantine and Justinian, as well as poets, Homer, Sophocles, Horace and Virgil, and philosophers, among them Aristotle, Plato, and Plotinus. (The Roman writers are particularly well done—see recommendations in the running text.) From Oxford come the Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World, some sixty in the latest listing (easily found online). It is unfair to nominate winners from so many contenders but *A Companion to the Hellenistic World* edited by Andrew Erskine strikes me as one of these survey volumes that show the genre at its best. Not least, Oxford University Press have their ‘Handbook’ series that include not only volumes on Egyptian, Greek, and Roman Studies but on important ‘growth’ areas such as Ancient Technology and Engineering and Maritime Archaeology.

The difficulties in using these survey volumes must be apparent from the range, some are somewhat conventional in approach, others have surprising gaps (presumably when a commissioned essay never arrived!) or varying approaches and levels of scholarship. All these series now pay full attention to Late Antiquity where there is a wealth of new scholarship.

The standard of ‘The Complete’ series as in *The Complete Pyramids* by Mark Lehner, *The Complete Greek Temples* by Tony Spawforth, or *The Complete Pompeii* by Joanne Berry is consistently good. They are published by Thames and Hudson in London. They are especially useful in providing maps, plans and line drawings.

For translations of classical texts, the Loeb Classical Library (Harvard University Press), which celebrated its centenary in 2011, is by far the most comprehensive and includes the original text alongside the translations. The full list of works can be downloaded from the Harvard University Press website. The better-known classical texts are also available in Penguin Classics series.

Much, of course, can be found online, from translations to surveys of archaeological sites and tours of museums. Try, as examples from each of the major civilizations:

www.Amarnaproject.com—the latest news on the excavation of el-Amarna in Egypt, with plans, downloadable resources, etc.

www.Sagalassos.be—full report on the excavations at Sagalassos, one of the finest Greek cities of Asia Minor.

www.Ostia-antica.org.—Exhaustive site on Ostia, the ancient harbour of Rome.

Documentaries on the ancient world can be marred by the egocentrism of the presenters (of whom more is seen than of the civilizations they profess to describe) or the urge to overthrow conventional thinking as an end in itself. Richard Miles's *Ancient Worlds* avoids these aberrations and the series (of six programmes) is much to be recommended.

SELECTED FURTHER READING

(NB These are general surveys of the key issues—more focused reading suggestions are included in the running text.)

GENERAL (I.E. BOOKS THAT TRANSCEND A SINGLE CIVILIZATION)

Bahn, Paul, and Renfrew, Colin, *Archaeology, Theories, Methods and Practice*, 6th edition, London, 2012.

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Beard, Mary, *Confronting the Classics: Traditions, Adventures and Innovations*, London and New York, 2013.

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Freeman, Charles, *Sites of Antiquity: From Ancient Egypt to the Fall of Rome, Fifty Sites that Explain the Classical World*, Taunton, 2009.

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ANCIENT NEAR EAST

Bertman, Stephen, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Mesopotamia*, New York, 2003.

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Szpakowska, Kasia, *Daily Life in Ancient Egypt: Recreating Lahun*, Oxford and New York, 2007.

Wilkinson, Richard, *Reading Egyptian Art*, London, 1992.

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Wilkinson, Richard, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, London and New York, 2003.

Wilkinson, Toby, *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt: The History of a Civilization from 3000 BC to Cleopatra*, London and New York, 2010.

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LATE ANTIQUITY/BYZANTIUM

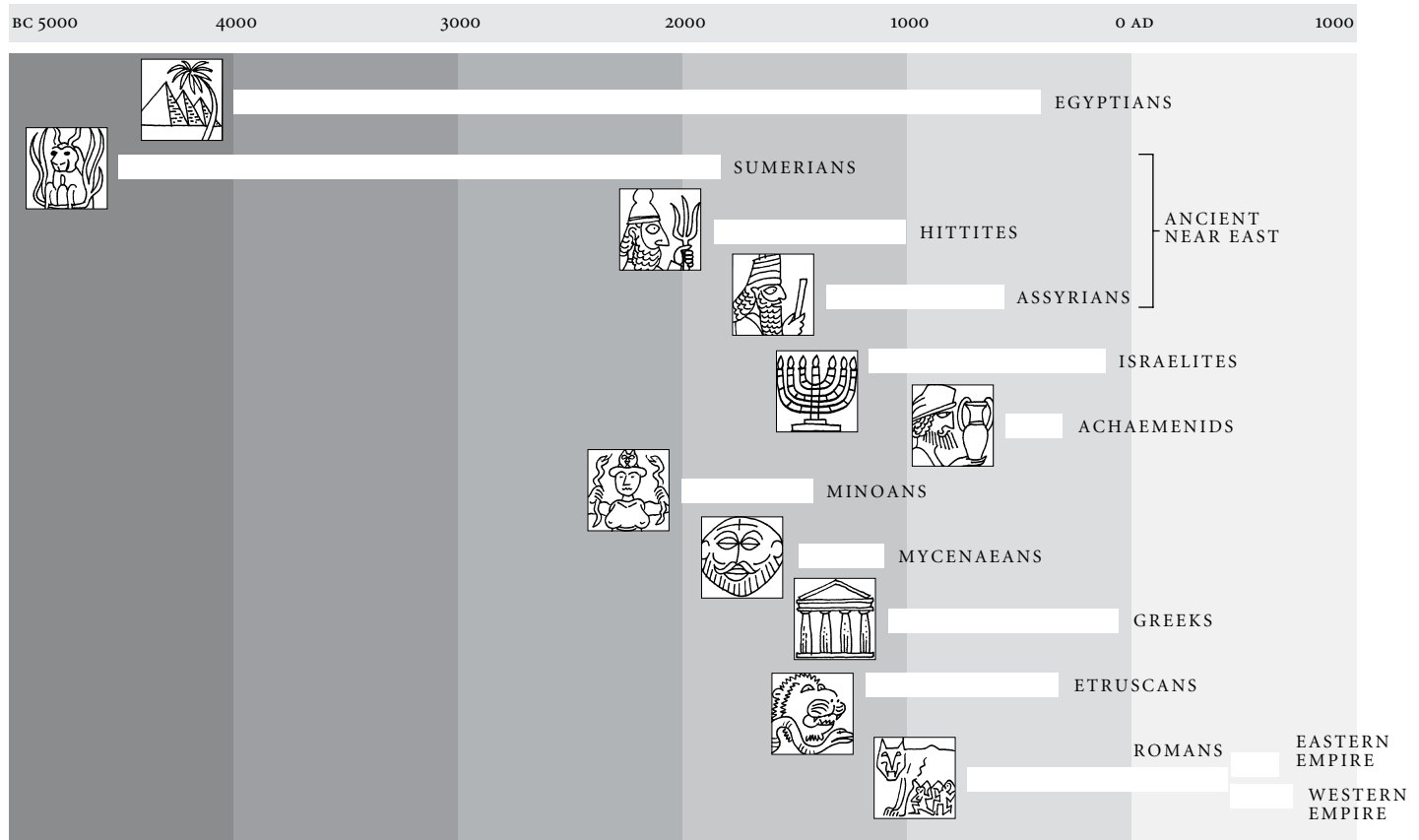
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DATE CHART



The Ancient Civilization of the Mediterranean

LIST OF EVENTS

Events unspecific to those cultures under discussion are set in italics

BC

EGYPT FROM 4000 BC TO THE ACCESSION OF PTOLEMY I, 305 BC

The chronology of ancient Egypt is subject to constant revision as new evidence emerges and these dates must be regarded as approximate!



4000	By this date the cultivation of the Egyptian staples, emmer wheat, barley, flax is under way in the Nile valley.
3600	The walled town of Naqada suggests well-established Egyptian trading routes.
3200	Hieroglyphic writing established in Egypt.
3000	First recorded unification of Egypt by King Narmer. Unification initiates Early Dynastic period (3000–2613 BC). Egyptian capital at Memphis.
2650	The tomb of King Djoser at Saqqar, built in the shape of a stepped pyramid, the first large stone monument known.
2613–2130	The Old Kingdom. The Age of the Pyramids.
c.2586–2256	Building of the Great Pyramid (for King Khufu) at Giza.
2160–2055	First Intermediate Period. Breakdown of central authority.
2055–1650	The Middle Kingdom. A restoration of stability.
1650–1550	Second Intermediate Period. The rule of the Hyksos.
c.1550–1070	The New Kingdom. Egypt as an imperial power. Major exploitation of Nubia and hegemony over the cities of south-west Asia.
1504–1492	Reign of Thutmose I. Thutmose reaches the Euphrates and is the first king to be buried in the Valley of the Kings, near Thebes. The foundation of the workmen's village at Deir el-Medina.
1473–1458	Reign of Queen Hatshepsut.
1390–1352	Reign of Amenhotep III, the zenith of the New Kingdom. Major programme of temple building at Thebes.
1352–1336	Reign of Akhenaten sees an attempt to found a new religion based on the worship of Aten, the sun. Foundation of the new capital at Tell el-Amarna. The new religion fails to take root.
c.1327	Death and burial of King Tutankhamun in the Valley of the Kings.
1279–1213	Reign of King Rameses II, the last of the great Egyptian kings.
1275	Battle of Qadesh between Egypt and the Hittites leads to the drawing of a boundary between the two states in Syria.
c.1260	Building of the Temple of Abu Simbel. First signs of the weakening of the New Kingdom.
1200	Egypt is among the states of the eastern Mediterranean attacked by the Sea Peoples.
1060	The breakdown of internal administration leads to the world's first recorded strike in the village of Deir el-Medina. The exhaustion of gold reserves in Nubia and the loss of the Asian empire leave Egypt reduced to its original valley boundaries.
1060–664	The Third Intermediate period. The fragmentation of Egypt.
727	The Kushite king Piankhi achieves a temporary reunification of Egypt.

671	Sacking of Memphis by the Assyrians.
664/3	The Assyrians sack Thebes and establish a loose hegemony over Egypt.
664–610	Rule of King Psamtek I (Greek Psammetichus). Psamtek is installed as a puppet by the Assyrians but manages to sustain the independence of Egypt against its nominal overlords and establish the Saite dynasty, so called from its capital Sais on the Delta.
c.620	Greek traders set up a trading post at Naucratis in the Nile Delta.
525	Egypt is conquered by the Persians.
462–454	An Egyptian revolt against Persian rule is supported by Athens but the Persians regain control.
332	Invasion of Egypt by Alexander the Great leads to the collapse of Persian rule. The city of Alexandria is founded in 332. After the death of Alexander (323) Egypt comes under the control of Ptolemy I and from now on is part of the Mediterranean world.
270	<i>A list of Egyptian dynasties is compiled by a priest, Manetho, and provides a framework which all subsequent historians have followed.</i>
196	<i>The Rosetta Stone, with its trilingual inscription, is inscribed. It later provides the key to the decipherment of hieroglyphs.</i>

Subsequent references to Egypt will be included in the main date list below.



SUMER

4900–3500	The first urban settlements in Mesopotamia, including Eridu and Uruk, mark the beginning of the civilization of Sumer.
3300	The emergence of cuneiform, the earliest form of writing. Logograms (symbols representing a word) are incised on clay tables with a stylus.
3000	Earliest known wheeled cart found in Mesopotamia.
3000	Discovery, again in Mesopotamia, that copper mixed with tin forms the harder metal bronze. (The so-called Bronze Age lasts until the adoption of iron c.1000 BC.)
2500	So-called Royal Graves at Ur.
2350	The earliest surviving law code, of Urukagina, ruler of the Sumerian city of Lagesh.
2330	The Sumerians are overrun by history's first recorded conqueror, Sargon of Akkade.
c.2150–2004	The Sumerians recover their independence in the so-called Third Dynasty of Ur. Compilation of the <i>Epic of Gilgamesh</i> .
c.2000	Collapse of Sumerian civilization as rival cities fight with each other and invading tribes for supremacy in southern Mesopotamia.
1760	The plains of southern Mesopotamia are overrun by Hammurapi, king of Babylon. Hammurapi also sacks the trading city of Mari. The archives of the city remain preserved to provide a major source of information for the period. Babylon now becomes the main centre of civilization in Mesopotamia.
1800	<i>The appearance of the two-wheeled chariot, an invention which is to transform warfare for the next thousand years.</i>

THE HITTITES

- 1650 The Hittites establish their capital at Hattusas in north-central Anatolia.
- 1650–1400 The Old Kingdom.
- 1380–1345 Reign of the Hittite king Suppiluliuma I. Conquest of the neighbouring state of Mitanni. The New Kingdom.
- 1275 The battle of Qadesh between the Hittites and the Egyptians. A boundary is consolidated between the two states.
- 1200 Collapse of the Hittites under the impact of the Sea Peoples.
- 1500 *The world's first alphabet (a single symbol representing each of the basic twenty consonantal sounds) is developed in Canaan. Several alphabets are developed in the area in the centuries that follow.*
- 1300–1000 *The Phoenicians develop their own alphabet. It passes to the Greeks in the ninth or eighth centuries.*



THE ASSYRIANS

- 1900–1400 The first Assyrian empire.
- 1300 The emergence of the middle Assyrian empire under King Adad-nirari I. The Assyrians inflict defeats on both the Hittites and Mitannians.
- 1114–1076 The Assyrians under King Tiglath-Pilaser expand beyond the Euphrates and even reach the Mediterranean. Tiglath-Pilaser's successes are followed, however, by the decline of Assyrian power. The Assyrian state, though limited in size, remains intact with an unbroken succession of kings.
- 900–850 Revival of the empire under a succession of strong Assyrian warrior-kings. The neo-Assyrian empire.
- 745–600 Under King Tiglath-Pilaser II and his successors Sargon II and Sennacherib the Assyrian empire expands to include Cyprus, southern Anatolia, Palestine, and Syria.
- 671 The Assyrians sack Memphis, the ancient Egyptian capital.
- 664/3 The Assyrians reach Thebes and assume hegemony over Egypt.
- 615–605 Collapse of Assyrian power after defeat by the Babylonians. The battle of Carchemish, 605, marks the final defeat of the Assyrians by King Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon. The empire vanishes from history.



THE ISRAELITES

- 1200 First mention of the Israelites (in an Egyptian document). No other reference survives from before the ninth century BC. The Israelites settle in Canaan, possibly after the disruptions caused by the Sea Peoples.
- Age of the Judges.
- c.1000 Possible date of King David.
- 10th cent. Rebuilding of cities in Canaan may reflect the activities of the Israelite king Solomon, recorded in the Hebrew scriptures as a great builder.
- c.924 The Israelites split into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah.
- 745–722 Israel is crushed by the Assyrians. Judah comes under Assyrian domination but survives as a state.
- 627–605 Judah becomes subject to Egypt.



605–562	Reign of Nebuchadrezzar II of Babylon sees the sacking of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and the Babylonian exile, the forcible transfer of many of Jerusalem's inhabitants to Babylon. The religious writings of the Israelites, the Hebrew scriptures, later the Old Testament, are first consolidated in this period.
539	Destruction of the Babylonian state by Cyrus I of Persia. The Jews are able to return from exile.
332	Alexander destroys the Achaemenid empire and Palestine eventually becomes part of the Ptolemies' kingdom.
198	Palestine passes from Ptolemaic to Seleucid rule.
167	The start of the Maccabean revolt.
63	Pompey enters Jerusalem and Palestine is now under Roman hegemony.
c.4 BC	Birth of Jesus.
c. 30 AD	Crucifixion of Jesus in Jerusalem.
66–74	Major Jewish revolt against Roman rule.



THE ACHAEMENID EMPIRE IN PERSIA

560–530	Reign of Cyrus I, the founding king of the Achaemenid empire.
546	Conquest of Lydia by Cyrus. Subjugation of the Ionian Greek cities of Asia Minor.
539	The defeat of the Babylonians and the liberation of the Jews, who are allowed to keep their identity within the Achaemenid empire.
525	Cambyzes, son of Cyrus, defeats King Psamtek III and captures Memphis. Egypt is henceforth subject to the rule of outsiders.
522	Darius becomes king after mounting a coup against Cambyzes.
514	Darius crosses the Hellespont into Thrace where he conducts inconclusive campaigns against the Scythians but maintains a Persian presence in Europe.
499–494	Revolt of Ionian Greeks against the Persians. The revolt is eventually defeated.
490	Expedition of the Persians against Athens and Sparta. The Persians are defeated at the battle of Marathon.
486	Darius dies. He is succeeded by his son, Xerxes.
480–79	Major expedition of Xerxes to Greece ends in the defeat of the Persian forces at Salamis (480) and Plataea (479).
477–467	Greek campaigns under Cimon of Athens lead to further Persian defeats and the elimination of the Persian threat to the Aegean.
454	The Athenians are defeated by the Persians after they have intervened in support of an Egyptian revolt against Persian rule.
450	Persia faces a revolt in Syria.
449	Probable date of a peace treaty between Persia and Athens.
411	The Spartans receive Persian money to help to rebuild their fleet.
401	Lysander, the Spartan commander, backs a coup against Artaxerxes the new king of Persia (ruled 404–359) by his brother Cyrus. It ends in failure.
395–386	Persia instigates the Corinthian War and by the end of the war has regained her rule over the Ionian Greeks as well as a continuing influence in Greek politics through the King's Peace of 386.
366–360	Revolt of the satraps against the Persian throne.

- 336 Philip of Macedon launches an invasion of Persia.
 335 Accession of Darius III, the last of the Achaemenid kings.
 334–330 Alexander conquers Persia and with the death of Darius in 330 the Achaemenid empire is at an end.

Subsequent references to Persia are included in the main date list below.

THE MINOANS

- 2000 Emergence of the 'palace' civilizations of Crete.
 2000–1600 The so-called 'Old Palace Period' of Minoan civilization.
 1628/7 Volcanic eruption on the island of Thera (modern Santorini) sees the extinction of the Aegean trading town of Acrotiri which is preserved under the ash.
 c.1600 Destruction of the Cretan palaces, followed by their rebuilding on a more magnificent scale.
 1600–1425 The so-called 'New Palace Period' of Minoan civilization.
 1550 Evidence of Minoan traders at Avaris on the Nile Delta.
 1425 New wave of destruction of Cretan palaces, possibly as a result of a Mycenaean conquest.



THE MYCENAEANS

- 2200–2000? Arrival of Greek speakers in Greece.
 1650 The first use of the shaft graves at Mycenae (rediscovered by Heinrich Schliemann in 1876). The graves are used and reused until c.1500.
 1600–1400 Consolidation of power by Mycenaean war leaders in Greece. Their power is sustained by raids overseas.
 1400 Possible takeover of Crete by the Mycenaeans. A Mycenaean presence is recorded throughout the Mediterranean from Italy to the coast of Asia and Egypt.
 1400 The Mycenaeans adopt Linear B as a syllabic script. (The language in which Linear B tablets were written were deciphered as Greek by Michael Ventris in 1952.)
 1200–1100 Collapse of Mycenaean civilization. Invasion of Dorians from the north?



THE GREEKS AFTER 1100

- 1100–800 The so-called Dark Ages.**
 1050–950 Migrations of Greeks to the Aegean and coast of Asia Minor. In Greece iron is used for the first time.
 1100–825 The settlement at Lefkandi provides evidence of the continuation of Greek culture in the Dark Ages. (c.975: The 'hero's' tomb at Lefkandi.) Trading links established with Cyprus.
 1050–900 Athenian pottery frees itself from Mycenaean influences and develops the so-called proto-Geometric style.



- 1000–750 *The Phoenicians enjoy widespread prosperity as traders throughout the Mediterranean. 814: traditional date of the foundation of Carthage by the Phoenicians.*
- 850 Greeks from Euboea are now involved in extensive trade with the Phoenicians and other peoples of the Near East.
- 825 A Greek presence established at al-Mina at the mouth of the Orontes river.
- 900–725 The age of Geometric pottery in Athens. (770–725: The years of the Dipylon master.)
- 776 Traditional date of the founding of the Olympic Games.
- c.775–750 First settlement of Pithekoussai (on the island of Ischia off the Italian coast) by Euboean Greeks (and others from the Near East).
- 753 *Traditional date of the founding of Rome.*
- 750 The Greeks borrow and adapt the Phoenician alphabet for their own use. It spreads throughout the Greek world.
- 750–700 The *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, traditionally attributed to Homer, reach their final form.
- 735 Greek colonization of Sicily begins. (733: Foundation of Syracuse by the Corinthians.)
- 725 Greeks set up a settlement at Cumae on the Italian coast enabling direct trade with the Etruscans.
- 720 First Greek colonization of southern Italy and the Chalcidice peninsula in the northern Aegean.
- 730–680 The Lelantine War between Chalcis and Eretria marks the end of the old aristocratic Greece. Corinth emerges as the most powerful of the Greek cities and is the centre of manufacture of Proto-Corinthian pottery (725 onwards).
- 730–620 The so-called Orientalizing Period sees a wide range of eastern influences permeating Greek culture.**
- 730–710 Spartan conquest of Messenia.
- c.700 Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days*.
- c.700 First penetration of the Black Sea by the Greeks. (Byzantium founded c.660, although permanent Greek settlements probably not established until c.650.)
- 675–640 Archilochus of Paros, poet.
- 669 Defeat of Sparta by Argos at the battle of Hysiae. The defeat, and a subsequent rebellion of the helots in Messenia, probably initiates the militarization of Spartan society.
- 660s onwards First Greek traders penetrate Egypt. By 600 Egyptian influences on Greek sculpture are apparent (in the marble *kouroi*, for instance).
- 657 Cypselus becomes tyrant in Corinth, overthrowing the aristocratic clan of the Bacchidae. Tyrannies become the most common form of government in the Greek states in the hundred years that follow.
- c.640 The poetry of the Spartan Tyrtaeus reflects the new importance given to loyalty to the *polis*.
- 630 Cyrene (north Africa) settled by Greek colonists from Thera.
- 621 Draco's 'Draconian' law code in Athens fails to relieve social tensions.
- 620–480 The Archaic Age, an age in which greater order and formality is brought to Greek culture.**
- 600 Foundation of Massilia (modern Marseilles) by the Phocaeans.

- 600 The world's first coinage emerges in Lydia. It spreads to the trading island of Aegina by 595 and Athens by 575.
- 594 Solon is appointed archon in Athens with full power to reform the state. Initiates important social and political reforms.
- 585 The prediction by Thales of Miletus of an eclipse of the sun is traditionally seen as the starting point of Greek philosophy. Thales' fellow Milesians, Anaximander and Anaximenes, develop his ideas in the decades that follow.
- 582–573 The spread of pan-Hellenic games (the Pythian Games at Delphi, 582, the Isthmian Games, 581, the Nemean Games, 573).
- 580 Phoenicians and Greeks clash over spheres of control in Sicily.
- 575–560 The temple to Hera at Samos, one of the first monumental Greek temples, is possibly influenced by similar monumental Egyptian buildings.
- c.570 Death of the lyric poet Sappho.
- 570 The so-called François vase, made in Athens, marks the re-emergence of Athens as a major pottery-making centre.
- 560 Defeat of the Spartans by the Tegeans at the Battle of Fetters leads to a more conciliatory approach by Sparta to her neighbours.
- c.550 The poet Theognis of Megara laments the threat to traditional aristocratic values.
- 540 The Etruscans and Phoenicians combine to drive out the Phocaeans from their new colony at Alalia (Corsica).
- 560–546 Peisistratus struggles, with eventual success, to achieve control as tyrant of Athens.
- 546–510 The Peisistratid tyranny in Athens sees the emergence of Athens as an important cultural force in Greece, with a major building programme on the Acropolis, the stimulation of religious festivals such as the Great Panathenaea, and the patronage of drama. (534: The first recorded tragedy at the city's festival to Dionysus.) The Peisistratid tyranny continues until Peisistratus' son Hippias is overthrown in 510. Sparta has meanwhile emerged as the champion of oligarchy and collaborates in the overthrow of the Peisistratids.
- 525 Pythagoras active in southern Italy, after being driven into exile from Samos.
- 525 Red-figure ware replaces black-figure as the main product of the Athenian potters. Earliest surviving bronze sculpture, a *kouros*, found at Athens. Bronze now becomes the preferred medium for free-standing statues.
- 520–c.490 Reign of King Cleomenes of Sparta. His active overseas policy leads to a leadership crisis at home and his eventual assassination.
- 509 Foundation of Roman Republic.
- 508/7 Reforms of Cleisthenes in Athens lay the foundations for Athenian democracy.
- 501 First election of the ten generals (*strategoi*) who are to become the most prestigious of the officers of the state in Athens in the fifth century.
- 500 The philosophers Heraclitus of Ephesus and Parmenides of Elea active.
- 499–494 Revolt of Ionian Greeks against the Persians. Athens and Sparta provide help. The revolt is eventually defeated.
- 498 First surviving poem of Pindar. First *Olympian Ode*, 476, first *Pythian Ode*, 470. Pindar remains active until at least 446.

- 493 Themistocles becomes archon at Athens. He initiates the building of the harbour at the Piraeus.
- 490 Expedition of the Persians against Athens and Sparta. The Persians are defeated at the Battle of Marathon.
- c.490 The so-called 'Kritian boy' from Athens traditionally marks the transition from Archaic to Classical art.
- 487 Comedies are presented for the first time at the Dionysia in Athens.
- 487 First recorded use of ostracism in Athens.
- 484 The tragedian Aeschylus achieves his first victory at the Dionysia festival.
- 482 The discovery of rich new silver deposits at Laurium allows Themistocles to build an Athenian fleet.
- 480–336 The Classical Age, traditionally seen as the culminating years of the Greek achievement.**
- 480–479 Major expedition of the Persian king Xerxes to Greece ends in the defeat of the Persian forces at Salamis (480) and Plataea (479). The Carthaginians (Phoenicians who have settled permanently in the western Mediterranean) attack Sicily and are also defeated.
- 477 The Delian League is founded and a period of continuing warfare against Persia under the Athenian aristocratic leader Cimon leads to the elimination of the Persian threat. Sparta acquiesces in Athenian expansion.
- 475–450 The relief sculptures on the temple to Zeus at Olympia, the major surviving example of early Classical art.
- 472 Aeschylus' *Persians*, a rare example of a tragedy dealing with a contemporary issue.
- 471 Ostracism of Themistocles by aristocratic factions in Athens.
- 470 Naxos forced back into the League after it tries to secede.
- 468 The tragedian Sophocles successfully challenges the supremacy of Aeschylus by winning first prize in the Dionysia festival.
- 465 The island of Thasos revolts against the League and is subdued by Athenian forces.
- 464 An earthquake in Sparta is followed by a revolt of the helots. Cimon takes a hoplite army to help suppress the revolt but his offer is rejected.
- 461 A democratic revolution in Athens leads to the ostracism of Cimon and the breaking off of relations with Sparta.
- 461–429 Pericles, one of the leaders of the revolution, maintains his personal supremacy in Athens throughout these years.
- 461–451 The first Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta. Athens builds the Long Walls (458). The first battle between Spartan and Athenian troops is at Tanagra, 457 and is followed by an Athenian conquest of Boeotia.
- 458 The *Oresteia* of Aeschylus. (456: Death of Aeschylus.)
- 455 Euripides produces his first play.
- 454 Heavy defeat for Athens by the Persians in Egypt. The Athenians move the treasury of the League from Delos to Athens.
- 451 Pericles' citizenship law limits citizenship to those both of whose parents are citizens.
- 450 Zeno of Elea's celebrated paradoxes develop Parmenides' logic to its extremes.
- 449 Probable date of peace treaty between Athens and Persia.

- 447–438 Rebuilding of the Parthenon in its present form. The sculptor Pheidias (490–432) seems to have been largely responsible for the design and decoration of the temple.
- 447 The defeat of the Athenians at the Battle of Coronea sees Athens lose control of Boeotia.
- 446–445 Thirty Year Peace signed between Sparta and Athens.
- c.445 The Athenian Coinage Decree requires members of the League to use only Athenian weights and measures. The League has in effect become an Athenian empire.
- 443 Athens founds a colony at Thurii in southern Italy, an indication of new interests in the west.
- 441 The *Antigone* of Sophocles.
- 440s Probable date of Herodotus' *History of the Persian Wars*.
- 440–430 The atomists, Leucippus and Democritus, suggest that all matter is made up of atoms. The sculptor Polykleitus of Argos stresses the ideal, mathematical, proportions of the human body.
- 440 Samos revolts against the empire but the revolt is suppressed.
- 437 Athens founds the city of Amphipolis to give her access to the timber and gold of Thrace.
- 433–431 Sparta and Athens drift towards war as Athens supports a revolt by Corcyra against Sparta's ally Corinth and the Spartans realize that an Athenian preoccupation with a revolt in Potidaea weakens her at home.
- 431 Outbreak of Second Peloponnesian War. Thucydides begins his history of the war. Euripides' *Medea*. Hippocrates of Cos, Socrates, and Protagoras of Abdera are all active in this period.
- 431–430 Pericles' *Funeral Oration*.
- 430 Plague at Athens kills a significant proportion of the population.
- 430 The statue of Zeus at Olympia is completed by Pheidias.
- 430 (or shortly afterwards) The first production of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*.
- 429 Death of Pericles.
- 428 Birth of Plato. The *Hippolytus* of Euripides is produced for the first time.
- 427 The visit of the orator Gorgias of Leontini (Sicily) to Athens fosters the birth of rhetoric.
- 427 The revolt of Mytilene sparks off the debate on its future in the Athenian assembly.
- 425–388 The comedies of Aristophanes (*Acharnians*, 425, *Clouds*, 423, *Birds*, 414, *Frogs*, 405).
- 425 The stalemate of the Peloponnesian War is broken by the capture of the Spartans at Sphacteria but Athenian hopes of controlling Boeotia end with her defeat by the Thebans at Delium (424).
- 424 The Spartan general Brasidas captures Amphipolis and other Athenian cities in the northern Aegean.
- 421 Peace of Nicias between Sparta and Athens. It is undermined by continued Athenian intrusion in the Peloponnese.
- 420–400 Temple of Apollo at Bassae built.
- 418 Battle of Mantinea. Sparta reasserts her control over the Peloponnese by defeating Argos and her ally Athens.
- 416 The defeat and enslavement of the island of Melos by Athens.

- 415 Euripides' *Trojan Women* explores the brutality of war.
- 415 The Athenian expedition leaves for Sicily.
- 413 The Athenian expedition ends in disaster and the Spartans regain the initiative by setting up a permanent base at Decelea in Attica.
- 411 The Spartans seek Persian help to rebuild their navy.
- 411 The Council of Four Hundred takes over in Athens. Democracy is restored in 410. The Athenians score several naval victories over the Spartans.
- 406 The Athenian naval victory at Arginusae leads to the assembly's debate on the fate of the generals who left sailors to drown.
- 406 Deaths of Euripides and Sophocles.
- 405 The *Bacchae* of Euripides is produced for the first time, after his death.
- 405 Dionysius I becomes dictator in Syracuse. He maintains himself in power until his death in 367, presenting a new model of government for the Greek world.
- 405 The Battle of Aigospotamiae sees the destruction of the Athenian fleet at the hands of the Persian commander, Lysander.
- 404 Surrender of Athens. The government of 'The Thirty Tyrants' is imposed on the city by Sparta. Democracy is restored in a counter-coup of 404/3.
- 405–395 Lysander is dominant in the Aegean although he loses much credibility after the defeat of the Persian prince Cyrus whom he has backed as pretender to the Persian throne (402). The historian Xenophon (c.428–c.354) extricates the Greek troops from Persia and recounts the expedition in his *March of the Ten Thousand*.
- 399 Death of Socrates after being found guilty of a charge of corrupting the young.
- 396–347 The philosopher Plato is active throughout these years. He founds the Academy in 387.
- 396–394 The Spartan king Agesilaus campaigns to free the Ionian Greeks from Persian control. In retaliation the Persians support Thebes, Athens, and Corinth against Sparta in the Corinthian War (395–386). The Athenians use Persian money to rebuild the Long Walls.
- 395 Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* is published.
- 386 In the so-called King's Peace, the Corinthian War is brought to a close. Persia regains control of the Ionian Greeks and maintains her influence in the Greek world.
- 382 The Spartans seize Thebes.
- 379 Thebes is liberated and in 378 Athens forms the Second Athenian League to counter Spartan power.
- 375–370 The rule of Jason in Thessaly confirms that one-man rule is a serious alternative to city democracy or oligarchy.
- 371 At the battle of Leuctra, Thebes comprehensively defeats Sparta and Sparta never recovers. From 371 to 362 Thebes is the most powerful state in Greece.
- 367 Aristotle joins the Academy.
- 362 With the death of the Theban leader Epaminondas, Theban power collapses. No Greek city state is able to take her place.
- 359 Philip II becomes king of Macedon. He soon consolidates his control of Macedonia and the surrounding area.

- 358–330 The theatre at Epidaurus at the shrine of Aesclepius, one of the finest surviving Greek theatres, is built. The sculptor Praxiteles of Athens (born c.390), known for his celebrated nude statue of Aphrodite, is also active at this time.
- 348 The sacking of the north Aegean city of Olynthus by Philip. The excavated remains of the city provide a major source of information on Greek houses.
- 357–355 Collapse of Second Athenian League.
- 356–352 Philip achieves hegemony in central Greece. His growing power is criticized by the Athenian orator Demosthenes (384–322).
- 356 Birth of Philip's son, Alexander, 'Alexander the Great'.
- 347 Death of Plato. Aristotle leaves Athens but returns in 337 to found his own school, the Lyceum.
- 340 Athens declares war on Philip.
- 338 At the battle of Chaeronea (in Boeotia) Philip destroys the army of Athens and her allies. The age of the independent city state is over. The triumph of Philip is welcomed by the Greek orator Isocrates (436–338) who has long advocated the unification of the Greek world under a single leader.
- 336 Philip launches an attack on Persia but dies in the same year. Alexander succeeds and rapidly establishes his own control of Macedonia and the Greek states. Thebes is sacked.
- 335 The Cynic Diogenes (c.400–324) reputedly meets Alexander in Corinth and impresses on him the importance of renouncing possessions.
- 336–31 **The Hellenistic Age. A period when the Greek world is divided between several monarchical states and a more unified Greek culture emerges. It is an age of speculation but also of anxiety which ends with the incorporation of the Greek world into the Roman empire.**
- 335 Accession of Darius III as king of Persia.
- 334 Alexander launches his invasion of Persia. His victory at Granicus leads to control of Asia Minor.
- 333 Alexander cuts the knot of Gordium and defeats the forces of Darius at Issus (September).
- 332–331 Alexander travels through Syria (siege of Tyre, 332) to Egypt where he is acclaimed as Pharaoh in place of Darius. A visit to the oracles of Ammon at Siwah (Libya) confirms Alexander's belief that he has divine ancestry. The city of Alexandria founded in 331.
- 331 Alexander's victory over Darius at Gaugamela allows him to take Babylon, Susa, and Persepolis. The great royal palace at Persepolis is burnt to the ground in the following year. Darius is murdered by his own people and the Achaemenid empire is at an end.
- 330–328 Alexander fights guerrilla campaigns in Bactria and Sogdiana.
- 326 Alexander reaches India and achieves his last great victory at the Battle of Hydaspes.
- 325 Alexander returns to central Persia via the river Indus and the Makram desert.
- 324–323 Alexander shows increasing instability as he attempts to bring order to his conquered territories.
- 323 Death of Alexander in Babylon.
- 322 Death of Aristotle in Euboea.

- 323–276 A power struggle breaks out among the descendants and officers of Alexander. Perdiccas, Alexander's senior cavalry officer, and Antigonous the One-Eyed fail to control the empire as a single unit. Antigonous is killed at the Battle of Ipsus (301). Three major states eventually emerge from Alexander's empire: Egypt under the Ptolemies, Macedonia under descendants of Antigonous, and the Seleucid empire in the east.
- 321–289 Career of Menander (the New Comedy).
- 320 Pytheas, from Massilia, makes a circumnavigation of Britain.
- 307 The philosopher Epicurus founds his school in Athens.
- 300 Zeno founds the Stoic school, so called because of its meeting place in a stoa, in Athens. The mathematician Euclid, author of *The Elements*, the founding text of modern mathematics, is active at this date. The Museum and Library is founded by Ptolemy I at Alexandria. The first world map is produced by Dicaearchus of Messenia.
- 290 The Aetolian League occupies Delphi and in the next seventy years emerges as the main political entity in central Greece.
- c.287 Birth, at Syracuse, of Archimedes, arguably the greatest mathematician of antiquity.
- 281 Foundation of the Achaean League, a federation of the city states of the Peloponnese.
- 280 Pyrrhus of Epirus ships an army to Italy in support of the city of Tarentum and provides the Romans with their first direct contact within the Hellenistic world.
- 279 Sacking of Delphi by the Celts.
- c.275 Aristarchos of Samos suggests that the earth goes round the sun.
- 274–271 War between Ptolemy II of Egypt and Antiochus I over Syria. There are subsequent Syrian wars between the two powers in 260–253, 246–241, and 219–217.
- 270 The poets Callimachus and Theocritus (founder of 'pastoral poetry') are active in Alexandria.
- 263–241 The emergence of Pergamum as a separate kingdom under Eumenes.
- 260s Herophilus of Chalcedon and Erasistratus of Ceos conduct experiments into the working of the human body.
- 238 His defeat of the Galatian Celts inspires Attalus I to rebuild Pergamum as one of the great cities of the Hellenistic world.
- 235–219 Reign of King Cleomenes of Sparta. Cleomenes integrates helots into the Spartan army.
- 229–219 Roman campaigns against the pirates of the Illyrian coast lead to the first Roman intrusion into the Hellenistic world.
- 223–187 Reign of the Seleucid king Antiochus III. Seleucid prestige in Asia is partially restored but Antiochus loses his position in the eastern Mediterranean after humiliating defeats by the Romans 192–188.
- 221 Philip V becomes ruler of Macedonia.
- 215 Philip allies with Carthage against Rome.
- 214–205 Rome declares war on Philip. The first Macedonian War (214–205). The Romans make an alliance with the Aetolian League.
- 212 or 211 Death of Archimedes in Syracuse after the city is sacked by the Romans.

- 206–185 Upper Egypt breaks free of Ptolemaic rule.
- 200 The mathematician Apollonius of Perge active.
- 200–197 The Second Macedonian War between Philip and Rome ends with Philip's defeat at Cynoscephalae.
- 196 Declaration of the freedom of the Greeks by the Roman commander Flamininus. The Romans leave Greece in 194.
- 196 The Rosetta Stone, a record of the thanksgiving of the priests of Memphis to Ptolemy V, is inscribed. It later provides the means by which Egyptian hieroglyphs are deciphered.
- 191 Defeat of Antiochus III by the Romans at Thermopylae.
- 189 Following the defeat of Antiochus at Magnesia (190) the cities of the Aetolian League are forced to become subject allies of Rome.
- 179 Perseus becomes king of Macedonia after the death of his father Philip.
- 171–138 Reign of Mithridates I, the first Parthian ruler to achieve full independence from the Seleucids.
- 168 Defeat of Perseus by the Romans at Pydna is followed by the break-up of Macedonia into four republics.
- 168 Humiliation of Antiochus IV by the Romans when he attempts an invasion of Egypt.
- 167 Guerrilla warfare breaks out in Judaea under the leadership of Judah Maccabee as a response to the intrusions of the Seleucids.
- 167 The Greek historian Polybius arrives in Rome.
- c.160 Building of the Great Altar of Zeus at Pergamum.
- 148 Macedonia becomes a Roman province after a revolt is suppressed there.
- 146 Crushing of the Achaean League by the Romans. Corinth is sacked.
- 141 The Seleucids accept the independence of Judaea under Simon Maccabee.
- 133 Pergamum is bequeathed to Rome and becomes the Roman province of Asia (129).
- 92 The first official meeting between the Romans and the Parthians, on the Euphrates.
- 88–85 Mithridates of Pontus encourages massacre of Roman citizens in Asia and attempts to liberate the Greeks from the Romans.
- 86 Sulla captures Athens and Mithridates is forced to retreat. Roman rule restored to the east.
- 74–63 Campaigns of Lucullus and Pompey in the east lead to the final defeat of Mithridates and the end of the Seleucid monarchy (64). Judaea also comes under Roman rule. Pompey reorganizes the provinces of the east.
- 55–53 Expedition of Crassus to Parthia leads to the humiliating defeat of Rome at Carrhae. Crassus is killed.
- 48–47 Caesar installs Cleopatra, daughter of Ptolemy XII, on the throne of Egypt.
- 41 Cleopatra meets Mark Antony and becomes his mistress.
- 36 Mark Antony's invasion of Parthia ends in disaster.
- 34 Antony and Cleopatra try to upstage Octavian by a great ceremony in Alexandria.
- 31 The forces of Antony and Cleopatra are defeated by Octavian at the Battle of Actium.
- 30 Antony and Cleopatra commit suicide. Egypt is annexed by Rome.



THE ETRUSCANS

- 1200 First signs of more intensive cultivation of Etruria.
- 900 Emergence of scattered villages on the tufa plateaux of Etruria. The 'Villanovan' period.
- 760 Decorative objects and the increased use of iron in Etruscan burials suggest increasing contact with the east. Burial evidence correlates with foundation of Pithekoussai settlement c.775–750.
- 700 First fortification of Etruscan settlements with tufa walls. Adoption of the Greek alphabet.
- 700–550 Evidence suggests widespread trading between Greeks, other easterners, and the Etruscans. The great age of Etruscan prosperity.
- c.616 The Etruscan Tarquin I becomes king of Rome. Rome remains under Etruscan influence for over a hundred years and absorbs many elements of Etruscan culture.
- 600 Emergence of the Etruscan temple form, adopted by the Romans.
- 550 The Etruscans come under threat from Greek expansionism, especially that of the Phocaeans.
- 540 The Phocaeans are defeated by a joint fleet of Etruscans and Phoenicians.
- 525 An Etruscan expedition against Cumae fails.
- 500 Declining trade along the coast forces the Etruscans to develop new cities in the northern Adriatic. New trade routes open up with the Celts of northern Europe, leading to the development of the Celtic La Tène culture.
- 474 Hiero of Syracuse defeats an Etruscan fleet. The Etruscan presence in Campania is eliminated during the century by Samnite raiders.
- 396 Capture of the major Etruscan city Veii by the Romans.
- 295 The defeat of the Etruscans, and others, at the Battle of Sentinum leads to Roman control of Etruria. The Etruscan trading cities of the north are gradually eliminated under pressures from both Romans and Celts.



ROME

The rise of Rome

- 10th cent. Possible date of first settlements on the hills of Rome.
- 753 Traditional date of the founding of Rome. From the mid-eighth century there is evidence of increasing contact between Rome and the outside world. Rome remains one of the community of Latin cities.
- 616–579 Traditional dates for the reign of Tarquin I. Rome is under Etruscan influence.
- 579–534 Reign of Servius Tullius. Servius Tullius, who was probably Latin rather than Etruscan, appears to expand and integrate the citizen body into the government of the city. Foundation of the *comitia centuriata* and a citizen army (the first legion).
- 534–509 Reign of Tarquin the Proud. First evidence of a major public building programme.
- 509 The Republic is founded after the expulsion of the kings. The consuls and other magistrates take the place of the kings.

- 499 Rome defeats the Latin communities at the Battle of Lake Regillus but later forms an alliance with them to face the neighbouring hostile tribes. Rome and her allies are constantly at war with these tribes during the fifth century.
- 490–440 The age of the patricians. Patrician families monopolize the consulships but come under increasing pressure to open government to plebeians.
- 471 The patricians recognize the *concilium plebis*, the assembly of the plebeians.
- 450 The publication of the Twelve Tables allows all to see the traditional laws of the city.
- 409 For the first time plebeians are admitted as quaestors (magistrates with financial responsibilities).
- 390 ‘Sack’ of Rome by the Celts.
- 343 First war with the Samnites.
- 342 At least one of the consuls is a plebeian from this date (172: The first year in which both consuls were plebeians.)
- 340 Latin war ends with Rome’s defeat of the Latins and the Campanians. The resulting settlement leaves Rome in control of Latium and Campania.
- 327 A new Roman colony at Fregellae provokes the Samnites to attack.
- 327–304 Second Samnite War sees Rome expand for the first time into central Italy.
- 312 The first of the great Roman roads, the Via Appia, built between Rome and Capua. The first aqueduct into Rome, the Aqua Appia, is also constructed.
- 298–290 Third Samnite War sees the crushing of the Samnites. (Battles of Sentinum, 295, and Aquilonia, 293.)
- 287 Resolutions of the *concilium plebis* are recognized as having the force of law.
- 280–275 Pyrrhus of Epirus lands in Italy in support of the Greek city of Tarentum. Despite initial successes he is forced to withdraw and southern Italy now falls under Roman hegemony.
- 264 The First Punic War (Rome versus the Carthaginians) begins after Rome intervenes in support of the Mamertines in Messina, Sicily. The war is at first confined to Sicily.
- 260 First naval encounter between Rome and Carthage ends in a Roman victory.
- 255–249 Rome is put on the defensive after defeats in Africa and at sea.
- 241 A naval battle off the Aegates Islands finally decides the war in favour of Rome. Carthage cedes Sicily to Rome.
- 237 Rome seizes Sardinia and Corsica from the Carthaginians.
- 229–219 Rome establishes a protectorate over the Illyrian coast.
- 227 The number of praetors (magistrates responsible for judicial affairs) is increased to four with two annually taking responsibility for Rome’s new overseas possessions.
- 225 Celtic invasion of Italy is defeated by the Romans at the Battle of Telamon. The invasion is followed by the suppression of the Celts in northern Italy.
- 221 Hannibal takes command of Carthaginian troops in Spain.
- 218 Hannibal’s capture of Saguntum, an ally of Rome, leads to the outbreak of the Second Punic War.

218	Hannibal invades Italy. First defeat of the Romans at Trebia.
217	Hannibal defeats the Romans at the battle of Lake Trasimene.
217–216	Fabius is appointed dictator in Rome and urges a less confrontationalist approach to Hannibal.
216	Fabius' advice is disregarded and the Romans confront Hannibal at Cannae. A disastrous defeat follows. Hannibal controls most of southern Italy.
215	Alliance of Philip of Macedon with Carthage leads to an inconclusive war between Philip and Rome (214–205).
212 or 211	The fall of Syracuse brings the first influx of Greek art into Rome.
211	Hannibal marches on Rome but fails to take the city. He is on the defensive from now on.
211–206	Roman victories in Spain under Scipio Africanus.
209 (or possibly much earlier)	Livius Andronicus introduces Greek drama and epic to Rome.
204	Scipio invades Africa. Hannibal is forced to return home.
204	First performance of a play by Plautus (active 204–184).
202	Battle of Zama, a victory for Rome, brings the war to an end. Carthage is now dependent on Rome. Rome has gained Spain for her empire.
202	First history of Rome (in Greek) by Fabius Pictor.

Rome and the Mediterranean world

202–150	The senate enjoys its greatest prestige as the governing body of Rome.
202–190	The final suppression of the Celtic tribes of northern Italy.
200–197	Second Macedonian War between Philip and Rome. Ends with Philip's defeat at Cynoscephalae.
196	Declaration of the freedom of the Greeks by the Roman commander Flamininus.
193–133	Continuous wars of pacification in Spain.
191	Defeat of Antiochus III by the Romans at Thermopylae.
189	Following the defeat of Antiochus at Magnesia (190) the cities of the Aetolian League are forced to become subject allies of Rome.
186	Greek-style games held in Rome for the first time. Suppression of Bacchanalian festivities by the senate.
184	Cato the Elder (234–149) becomes censor and launches his campaign against the corrupting influences of the east.
c.180	Ennius composes his <i>Annales</i> , an epic poem on the history of Rome.
180	Minimum ages specified for praetors and consuls.
179	Perseus becomes king of Macedonia after the death of his father Philip.
168	Defeat of Perseus by the Romans at Pydna is followed by the break-up of Macedonia into four republics.
168	Humiliation of Antiochus IV by the Romans when he attempts an invasion of Egypt.
167	The Greek historian Polybius arrives in Rome. He is to observe the Roman conquest of Greece and record it in his <i>Universal History</i> .
167	The scale of plunder from Rome's wars allows direct taxation in Italy to be abolished.
160s	The plays of Terence performed in Rome during these years.
149	Courts set up in which governors can be prosecuted. Cato publishes his history of Rome.

- 148 Macedonia becomes a Roman province after a revolt is suppressed there. Vast quantities of booty are brought back to Rome.
- 146 Crushing of the Achaean League by the Romans. Corinth is sacked. Carthage is also razed to the ground.
- 139 A secret ballot is established through a law passed by a tribune in the *concilium plebis*. A popular challenge to the senate.
- 136–132 Slave uprising in Sicily.
- 133 Pergamum is bequeathed to Rome and becomes the Roman province of Asia in 129.
- 133 Tribune of Tiberius Gracchus leads to clashes between supporters of the senate and the people. Tiberius is killed but his land commission survives.
- 125 Proposal by Fulvius Flaccus that members of allied cities be offered citizenship.
- 124–122 Tribunes of Gaius Gracchus.
- 121 Gaius Gracchus is killed after the senate passes a *senatus consultum ultimum* to authorize the massacre of his supporters.
- 121 Gallia Narbonensis (southern Gaul) becomes a Roman province.
- 111–110 Outbreak of war with Numidia (the Jugurthine War).
- 107–100 Marius holds the consulship six times, finishes the Jugurthine War, and then defeats the Cimbri and Teutones, German tribes threatening Rome from the north. Marius goes into exile after he fails to obtain land for his veterans in Italy.
- 92 The first official meeting between the Romans and the Parthians, on the Euphrates.
- 91–88 The Social War, a major war between Rome and her Italian allies. Rome cedes citizenship to all communities south of the Po river.
- 88–85 Mithridates of Pontus encourages massacre of Roman citizens in Asia and attempts to liberate the Greeks from the Romans. Sulla marches on Rome after an attempt to deprive him of the eastern command.
- 87–84 Cinna, an opponent of Sulla, holds the consulship for four successive years, while Sulla is on campaign in the east. He is supported by Marius until the latter's death in 86.
- 86 Sulla captures Athens and Mithridates is forced to retreat. Roman rule restored to the east.
- 83–82 Sulla returns to Rome, seizes power, and eliminates his opponents in a civil war. Remains dictator until 79 and restores the power of the senate.
- 80–72 Sertorius gains control of Spain. Pompey is used by the senate to regain the Spanish provinces for Rome.
- 74 Renewal of war on Rome by Mithridates. Licinius Lucullus sent to confront him.
- 73–71 Massive slave uprising under Spartacus. Order restored by Crassus and Pompey.
- 70 Crassus and Pompey hold the consulships. Cicero's speeches against Verres establish him as Rome's leading orator.
- 67 Pompey receives the command, through the *concilium*, to deal with piracy.
- 66–63 After being given command in the east Pompey engineers the final defeat of Mithridates and the end of the Seleucid monarchy (64). Judaea

- also comes under Roman rule. Pompey reorganizes the east, establishing the new provinces of Bithynia, Cilicia, and Syria.
- 63 Cicero, consul for the year, initiates the defeat of the Catiline conspiracy. Julius Caesar is elected *pontifex maximus*.
- 62 Pompey returns to Italy and disbands his army.
- 60 Pompey, Crassus, and Caesar form the 'first triumvirate'.
- 59 Caesar consul. His daughter Julia marries Pompey and Caesar initiates legislation in favour of Crassus and Pompey.
- 59–54 Catullus's poems to Lesbia.
- 58–49 Caesar's conquest of Gaul. He recounts the campaign in his *Gallic Wars*.
- 58–57 Cicero is exiled at the instigation of P. Clodius. He returns through the help of Pompey on whom he is now dependent.
- 56 Caesar meets Crassus and Pompey at Luca and renews the agreement between them.
- 55 Pompey and Crassus hold the consulships. Pompey secures the command in Spain but delegates the command and remains in Italy.
- 55 Death of the poet Lucretius. His *De Rerum Natura* is published posthumously. Cicero produces his first literary work, on oratory, and, in 54, starts *De Republica*. Pompey's theatre is the first stone theatre in Rome.
- 55–54 Caesar's campaigns in Britain.
- 55–53 Expedition of Crassus to Parthia leads to the humiliating defeat of Rome at Carrhae. Crassus is killed.
- 54 The death of Julia symbolizes the breakdown of the relationship between Caesar and Pompey. They are both also seeking popularity through massive building programmes in Rome.
- 52 Clodius is killed in street-fighting. Pompey is appointed sole consul by the senate in an attempt to restore order.
- 52–49 Intense political infighting as Caesar attempts to maintain his *imperium*. The senate forms an alliance with Pompey.
- 49 Caesar crosses the Rubicon and Pompey leaves for the east.
- 48 At the Battle of Pharsalus Caesar defeats Pompey. Pompey is murdered in Egypt. Caesar installs Cleopatra, daughter of Ptolemy XII, on the throne of Egypt.
- 47–45 Caesar campaigns in Africa, the east, and in Spain.
- 46 Caesar assumes a ten-year dictatorship and celebrates his victories with four triumphs.
- 45–44 Cicero's main philosophical works are written in these years.
- 45–44 Dictatorship of Caesar arouses increasing concern and eventually leads to his assassination, March 44.
- 44 Mark Antony controls Rome. Attacked by Cicero in his *Philippics*.
- 43 Octavian, the designated heir of Caesar, seizes the consulship and forms a triumvirate with Antony and Lepidus. Cicero is murdered at their command.
- 42 Cassius and Brutus, murderers of Caesar, are defeated at Philippi and commit suicide. The senate declares Caesar a god. Antony remains in charge of the east, Octavian in the west.
- 42 Cisalpine Gaul formally becomes part of Italy.
- 41 Cleopatra meets Mark Antony and becomes his mistress.
- 38 Virgil's *Eclogues* are published.

- 36 Mark Antony's invasion of Parthia ends in disaster.
 34 Antony and Cleopatra try to upstage Octavian by a great ceremony in Alexandria.
 31 The forces of Antony and Cleopatra are defeated by Octavian at the Battle of Actium.
 30 Antony and Cleopatra commit suicide. Egypt is annexed by Rome.
 29 Virgil's *Georgics* are completed. Livy begins publication of his history of Rome. Publication of Horace's *Epodes*.
 27 The 'restoration' of the Republic by Octavian. He is granted the name Augustus. Gradually (27–22 BC) Augustus accumulates enough power to emerge, unquestionably, as the dominant figure in the constitution.
 26–16 The poet Propertius writes his *Elegies*.
 25 Ovid begins writing the *Amores*.
 24–23 Publication of the first three books of Horace's *Odes*.
 23 Augustus surrenders the consulship and consolidates his political position with the grant of new powers. Completion of Vitruvius' *De Architectura*, later to become the most influential work on Roman architecture.
 20 Settlement with Parthia allows the return of the standards lost at Carrhae to Rome.
 19 Death of Virgil. The *Aeneid* is preserved for publication by Augustus.
 17 Horace's *Centennial Hymn* symbolizes his acceptance of the Augustan regime.
 12 Augustus becomes *pontifex maximus*.
 12–9 The Balkan tribes are pacified for the first time and the provinces of Dalmatia and Pannonia established. Roman forces reach the Elbe.
 9 Dedication of the Ara Pacis.
 c.4 Birth of Jesus in Galilee.
 2 Dedication of the Forum of Augustus. Augustus is declared *Pater Patriae*, 'Father of the Fatherland'.
 c.1 Ovid's *Art of Love*.

AD

- 2–4 After many abortive attempts at finding an heir, Augustus appoints his son-in-law, Tiberius, as his successor. The *Metamorphoses* of Ovid.
 5–6 The position of the army is consolidated with the normal period of service set at twenty years and the state assuming responsibility for discharged soldiers.
 6–9 A major uprising in Pannonia is followed by the massacre of three legions in the German forests (near modern Osnabrück). A frontier on the Rhine is increasingly accepted as the limit of the empire.
 14 Augustus dies. Tiberius, the first of the house of Julio-Claudians, succeeds peacefully.
 19 Death of Germanicus, Tiberius' designated heir.
 23 Death of Tiberius' son Drusus.
 26 Tiberius withdraws to Capri.
 c.29–30 Crucifixion of Jesus in Jerusalem. Foundation of early church.
 31 Execution of the praetorian prefect Sejanus after Tiberius discovers the extent of his power.
 37 Death of Tiberius aged 77. Succession of Gaius (Caligula).

- 40 Jesus' brother James becomes leader of the 'Jewish church' in Jerusalem but as a result of the missionary work of Paul Christianity spreads more successfully in Gentile communities.
- c.42–54 The letters of Paul, the earliest surviving Christian writings.
- 41 Caligula is assassinated after it becomes clear there is no constitutional way of removing an unsatisfactory emperor. Claudius becomes emperor.
- 43 Invasion of Britain boosts Claudius' position. Britain becomes a permanent part of the empire.
- 43–54 Claudius develops an imperial bureaucracy at the expense of the powers of the senate.
- 49 Claudius marries Agrippina, the mother of the future emperor Nero. Agrippina consolidates her position.
- 54 After the death of Claudius, Agrippina engineers the succession of Nero and the death of Claudius' son Britannicus.
- 54–59 Years of stability under the influence of the 'Stoic' Seneca.
- 59 Nero's murder of his mother Agrippina is followed by his growing instability.
- 60 Revolt of Boudicca in Britain.
- 62 Humiliation of the Romans by the Parthians. Rome forced to accept a Parthian nominee as ruler of Armenia, the buffer state between the two empires.
- 64 A major fire in Rome is blamed on the Christian community. Nero builds his Golden House among the ruins.
- 65 Seneca commits suicide.
- 65–100 Composition of the gospels and the Acts of the Apostles.
- 66 The senator Petronius, author of the *Satyricon*, commits suicide.
- 66–74 Major revolt in Judaea is suppressed with great brutality.
- 67 Nero tours Greece.
- 68 Revolt against Nero breaks out in Gaul. Nero commits suicide.
- 69 The year of the four emperors, Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and Vespasian. Vespasian eventually wins control of the empire and reigns until 79.
- 70 Titus, the son of Vespasian, sacks the temple of Jerusalem and brings many of its treasures to Rome. Titus' arch in Rome celebrates his victory.
- 78–86 Revolt of Julius Civilis and establishment of a short-lived Gallic empire.
- 79–81 Major campaigns by Agricola in Britain.
- 79 Reign of Titus.
- 79 Eruption of Vesuvius destroys Pompeii and Herculaneum. The encyclopaedist Pliny the Elder, author of *The Natural History*, dies in the eruption.
- 80 The Colosseum is inaugurated.
- 81–96 Reign of Domitian. Domitian builds a major palace for himself on the Palatine Hill.
- 80s The consolidation of the Rhine–Danube frontier with the formation of the provinces of Upper and Lower Germany and more effective fortifications. Domitian invades Dacia and reduces the Dacian king Decabalus to the status of client.
- 85 The 'Jewish' Christian church in Jerusalem is in decline. The future of Christianity lies with the Greek-speaking Gentile communities.
- 86–98 The *Epigrams* of Martial.

- 96 Domitian is assassinated in Rome. The senators move their own nominee, Nerva, into his place.
- 98 Trajan succeeds as emperor on the death of Nerva. The more relaxed atmosphere of his reign allows the historians Tacitus and Suetonius to write their histories of the first century. The letters of Pliny the Younger cover events from 97 to 113. Plutarch's *Lives* also date from these years.
- 101–106 Trajan conquers Dacia and builds his forum and market in Rome from the plunder. Trajan's column is decorated with relief sculptures of the campaign.
- 110–117 The *Satires* of Juvenal.
- 114–117 Trajan invades Parthia. Temporary annexation of Armenia and Mesopotamia.
- 117 Trajan dies. He is succeeded by Hadrian.
- 117–138 Reign of Hadrian. Attempts at expansion halted and the empire settles within its frontiers. The emperor travels widely and his love of Greece helps integrate the east further into the empire. Building of the Pantheon, Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli, and Hadrian's Wall in northern Britain (121).
- 127–148 Ptolemy of Alexandria, perhaps the greatest of the Greek astronomers, active.
- 132–135 Major Jewish revolt after a Roman colony is founded by Hadrian in Jerusalem.
- 138 Death of Hadrian. Succession of Antoninus Pius.
- 138–161 Reign of Antoninus Pius, traditionally seen as the moment when the empire reached its most perfect form.
- 150 Panagyrical speech of the Greek Aelius Aristides praises the beneficence of Roman rule. Aelius Aristides is one of the leaders of the Second Sophistic, a revival in the art of Greek oratory. The physician Galen, the founding father of physiology and the greatest scientist of his day, is active.
- c.155 Apuleius' novel *The Golden Ass*.
- 161 Succession of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus as joint emperors. Parthian invasion beaten off with difficulty by Verus. Plague spreads from Persia into the empire.
- 168–175 Wars of Marcus Aurelius on the Danube end with the repulse of the German invaders.
- 172–180 *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius.
- 177 Marcus Aurelius confirms that Christians who refuse to recant can be put to death.
- 180 Commodus becomes emperor on the death of his father Marcus Aurelius. Although the borders are secure Commodus' behaviour earns universal condemnation and he is assassinated in 192.
- 190–200 Clement of Alexandria accepts that Greek philosophy may be of value to Christians.
- 192–193 Septimius Severus achieves power following an empire-wide struggle over the throne. He consolidates the position of the army.
- 197 Severus campaigns in Parthia and temporarily adds Mesopotamia to the empire. The Parthian empire is steadily weakening due to external and internal pressures.

200 onward	Consolidation of German tribes into large groupings. (The Alamanni, 'all men,' first attested in 213.)
200 onward	Tertullian (died c.225), 'the father of Latin theology,' and Origen (died 254), perhaps the most brilliant of the early Christian theologians, active.
203	Septimius Severus' triumphal arch in Rome.
203	Perpetua martyred in Carthage, leaving a diary of her experiences as a Christian.
208–211	Severus campaigning in Britain. Dies at York.
211	Severus' sons, Caracalla and Geta, succeed as joint emperors. Caracalla soon eliminates Geta.
212	Caracalla declares all free subjects of the empire to be citizens.
212–216	Caracalla builds his baths in Rome. The jurist Ulpian is active.
218–222	Elagabalus emperor. His adherence to the sun god arouses universal hostility and he is assassinated.
222–237	Reign of Severus Alexander, last of the Severan dynasty.
226	The crowning of the Persian leader Ardashir at Ctesiphon establishes the Sasanian empire in place of the Parthian.
234–284	The years of crisis as the empire is under continual pressure from German tribes and the Sasanian (Persian) empire. A high turnover of emperors.
244	Plotinus settles in Rome. Uses Plato's ideas as the basis of Neoplatonism.
249–251	The emperor Decius launches a major persecution of Christians.
251	Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, argues that bishops should act in consensus when determining doctrine.
253 or 254	Sacking of Antioch by the Sasanians. The Goths reach Ephesus.
260	Capture and humiliation of the emperor Valerian by the Sasanians.
260–274	The 'Gallic empire' maintains its independence within the empire as does the separatist state of Palmyra.
267	Athens is sacked by the Heruli.
270–275	Reign of the emperor Aurelian sees the beginning of an effective fightback against Rome's enemies. Aurelian restores unity to the empire by eliminating the Gallic empire and the state of Palmyra.
276–282	Reign of Probus sees a further strengthening of the empire.
282	Carus becomes the first emperor not to seek formal recognition by the senate.
284	A Balkan general, Diocletian, becomes emperor.
286–293	Foundation of the Tetrarchy, rule of two Augusti and two Caesars. Emergence of new imperial capitals at Trier, Milan, Sirmium, and Nicomedia. Diocletian sets in hand a major reorganization of the structure of the empire.
293	Diocletian attempts to stabilize the currency by introducing a gold coinage.
297	A major defeat of the Sasanians brings peace to the eastern frontier.
298–306	Building of Diocletian's monumental baths in Rome.
301	Diocletian's Edict of Prices attempts to eliminate inflation. It proves impossible to administer and has little effect.
303–312	Last major persecution of Christians under Diocletian and his successor Galerius.
305	Abdication of Diocletian. A power struggle ensues.

- 312 The Battle of Milvian Bridge near Rome establishes Constantine as ruler of the western empire.
- 313 The Edict of Milan, signed by Constantine and Licinius, emperor in the east, introduces empire-wide toleration for Christianity.
- c.314–315 Arch of Constantine erected in Rome.
- 324 Constantine defeats Licinius and becomes sole emperor. He begins the building of Constantinople and provides material support for the first great Christian churches.
- 325 Constantine presides over the council of Nicaea, the first great ecumenical council. Condemnation of Arius.
- 330 Dedication of Constantinople.
- 333–379 Life of Basil of Caesarea. Basil establishes that the ideal of monastic life is service to the poor. His monastery has a hospital and a leper colony.
- 337 Death of Constantine. He is succeeded by his three sons.
- 351 Battle of Mursa sees the emergence of the surviving son, Constantius, as sole emperor. His reign is dominated by campaigns on the Persian border.
- 356–360 Julian, a cousin of Constantius, restores order along the northern borders.
- 357 Constantius' visit to Rome, memorably described by Ammianus Marcellinus.
- 361 Julian becomes emperor on the death of Constantius. The last of the non-Christian emperors, Julian attempts, unsuccessfully, to restore pagan beliefs.
- 363 Death of Julian while campaigning in Persia. The campaign ends in humiliation for the Romans.
- 364–375 Reign of Valentinian, probably the last effective emperor in the west.
- 374–397 Ambrose, bishop of Milan, proves a formidable campaigner against paganism and heresy.
- 376 Crossing of the Danube by Goths fleeing from the Huns.
- 378 The Battle of Adrianople. The emperor of the east, Valens, and many of the finest Roman troops, killed in a major encounter with the Goths.
- 378 Ammianus Marcellinus starts his history of the empire. Only the part dealing with the period 354 to 378 now survives.
- 381 Condemnation of Arianism by the council of Constantinople.
- 382 Theodosius, emperor in the east, signs a treaty with the Goths allowing them independent status within the empire.
- 380s Jerome begins his Latin translation of the Old and New Testaments. It is completed before his death in 420.
- 385 Augustine appointed professor of rhetoric at Milan. The experiences leading to his conversion here are described in *The Confessions* (written 397–400). He returns to his native Africa in 388 and becomes bishop of Hippo in 395.
- 388–395 Theodosius sole emperor. The last reign in which the empire is ruled as a single unit. Under the influence of Ambrose, Theodosius uses his power to uphold orthodox Christianity against heresy and paganism.
- 390s John Chrysostom preaching in Antioch. Made bishop of Constantinople in 398.

- 394 Theodosius defeats a pagan usurper Eugenius at the battle of the river Frigidus. Traditionally seen as the moment when Christianity is triumphant.
- 395 The death of Theodosius. The empire is split between his two sons, Arcadius and Honorius.

THE WESTERN EMPIRE AD 395–600

- 395–423 Reign of Honorius. Honorius moves his court to Ravenna (402) and the empire is now fronted by military strong men.
- 402–408 Stilicho, the ‘master of the soldiers’, effective ruler of the western empire.
- 406–407 Major invasion of Vandals, Sueves, and Alamanni into the empire. One result is the collapse of Roman rule in Britain and Spain. The Vandals reach southern Spain.
- 410 Sack of Rome by Alaric.
- 413–426 Augustine writes his *The City of God*.
- 418 The Visigoths are established as a ‘federate’ kingdom in Aquitaine.
- 423–433 Galla Placidia, mother of the young emperor Valentinian, the dominant figure in the west.
- 425 The earliest mosaics in Ravenna in the mausoleum of Galla Placidia.
- 429 The Vandals, under Gaiseric, move into north Africa.
- 430 Death of Augustine in Hippo while the city is under siege by the Vandals.
- 433 Aetius, Galla Placidia’s ‘master of soldiers’, becomes the new strong man of the west. His main aim is to keep Gaul within the empire.
- 435 The Vandal kingdom in north Africa is given ‘federate’ status.
- 438 Proclamation of Theodosius II’s law code throughout the empire.
- 439 Carthage sacked by the Vandals. Gaiseric then takes over the islands of the western Mediterranean.
- 443 The Burgundians are given ‘federate’ status after being defeated by Aetius.
- 445 Attila becomes leader of the Huns and launches attacks on the empire.
- 451 Battle of Catalaunian Plains. Attila is forced to retreat but invades Italy in 452. Dies in 453 and his empire collapses.
- 454 Aetius, discredited by his failure to protect the empire against the Huns, is assassinated.
- 455 Death of Valentinian. Rome is sacked by Gaiseric.
- 458 Sicily, the earliest Roman province (241 BC), captured by the Vandals.
- 458–476 Breakdown of the central authority of the western empire as emperors and ‘strong men’ struggle for power.
- 476 The deposition of Romulus Augustus marks the end of the western empire.
- c.480–547 Life of Benedict whose Rule for monastic living becomes the most influential of those adopted in the west.
- 493–526 The Ostrogoth Theodoric establishes a state in Italy which expands to include Provence and Visigothic Spain.
- 490s Church of San Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, the palace church of Theodoric, begun.

498 or 499	Conversion of the Frankish king Clovis to orthodox Christianity. Clovis lays the foundations of a large Frankish kingdom.
520s	Building of San Vitalis in Ravenna begun.
524	Boethius' <i>The Consolation of Philosophy</i> . Boethius is the last Latin speaker to have a comprehensive mastery of Greek and leaves a translation of many of Aristotle's works.
530s	Building of San Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna.
533	Justinian's successful invasion of Vandal Africa.
533–548	Under Theudebert the Frankish kingdom extends over both France and Germany.
535	Justinian invades Ostrogothic Italy but his campaign runs into trouble.
540	Cassiodorus organizes the collection and copying of classical and early Christian manuscripts.
554	Justinian finally achieves control of Italy.
569–586	The reign of Leovigild sees the reunification of Spain.
586–601	Reign of Reccared in Spain. Reccared announces his conversion to orthodox Christianity and establishes an alliance between church and state in Spain.
590–604	Pope Gregory develops the concept of papal authority in the west, laying the foundations of the medieval papacy.
600–636	Isodore, bishop of Seville, urges the preservation of classical learning.
640s onwards	Arab conquests of north Africa and Spain.
733	Victory of Charles Martel at Poitiers finally stems Arab expansion.

THE EASTERN EMPIRE AD 395–600

395–408	Arcadius emperor in the east.
400	Uprising in Constantinople against Gainas, the Goth commander of the city's garrison.
408–450	Reign of Theodosius II. Constantinople consolidated as the capital of the eastern empire. Image of the emperor as God's representative on earth.
431	Council of Ephesus proclaims Mary to be Theotokos, 'the mother of God', and thus plays down the human nature of Jesus.
450–457	Reign of Marcian.
451	Council of Chalcedon proclaims that Christ had two natures, human and divine, within the same undivided person, but the controversy over the nature of Christ continues.
457–474	Reign of Leo I. Leo attempts to lessen the dependency of the empire on foreign troops. Invasion of Vandal Africa in conjunction with the western empire proves a disaster.
474–491	Reign of Zeno, a period of instability with revolts from the Isaurians and invasions by the Goths.
491–518	Reign of Anastasius. A period of prosperity and stable administration.
518–527	Reign of Justin, formerly commander of the palace guard.
527–565	Reign of Justinian, Justin's nephew.
536	Closure of the temple to Isis at Philae in southern Egypt marks the end of traditional Egyptian religion.

527–534	Justinian's Law Code.
532	The Nika riots, which almost overthrow Justinian, are suppressed with ferocity.
532–537	Rebuilding of St Sophia in Constantinople.
533	Successful invasion of Vandal Africa by Justinian's general Belisarius.
535–554	Invasion and eventual conquest of Italy.
540	The Sasanians sack Antioch. Major outbreaks of plague in the empire.
c.547–554	The historian Procopius writes his history of Justinian's wars as well as his <i>Secret History</i> and <i>Buildings</i> .
548	Death of Justinian's empress, Theodora.
550s	First Slav penetration of the Balkans.
553	Council of Constantinople fails to resolve the controversy over the nature of Christ.
565	Death of Justinian. The authoritarian and profoundly Christian empire he has sustained is now normally referred to as the Byzantine empire.
620s	Muhammad consolidates power in the Arabian peninsula.
610–641	The reign of Heraclius. Fight back against the Sasanian empire brings it close to collapse but the empire is faced almost immediately by the onslaught of the Arabs.
632	Death of Muhammad. His successor Abu Bakr leads the attack on the Sasanian and Byzantine empires.
636	Battle of Yarmuk sees the defeat of the Byzantines. Arab conquest of Syria and Palestine. The Sasanian empire is also overrun by the Arabs.
642	Alexandria lost to the Arabs.
640s onwards	A reduced Byzantine state maintains its independence until the sack of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks in 1453.

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